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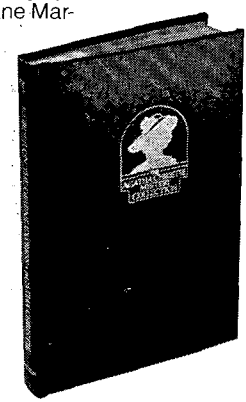

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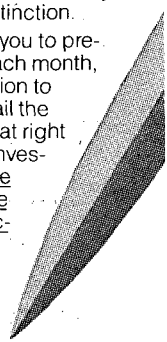

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a *NEW* Jeffery Rand story by

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Socrates was a suicide club with regular clubrooms in St. James's Place, Hastings told Rand. Those who joined desired help and support in ending their own lives. The membership rolls were a closely guarded secret, but as Rand might imagine, Hastings added, there was quite a turnover . . .

THE SPY AND THE SUICIDE CLUB

by EDWARD D. HOCH and JOSH PACHTER

It was at the funeral of Sir William Mackintosh, at the beginning of a dreary London winter, that Rand encountered his old superior Hastings for the first time in several months. He wasn't surprised to see Hastings there. Mackintosh had, after all, been one of the top men in Overseas Operations before the scandal hit. But it was Hastings' appearance that shocked him. The man had grown old suddenly, and though Rand knew he was past sixty the sight of his thin, lined face at the cemetery troubled him.

A misty rain had begun to fall by the time the minister finished the graveside prayers, and as Hastings turned up the collar of his coat and started back to the line of waiting cars, Rand caught him by the elbow to say hello. "Well, Rand—good to see you. How's Leila?"

"She's fine, but how about you? A bit under the weather?"

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Hastings shrugged. "Funerals depress me. I worked with Bill Mackintosh for over twenty years. To think he could go like this—"

"There's no doubt it was suicide?"

"Hardly any. This homosexual business broke in the tabloids three weeks ago, as you know. He offered his resignation at once and it was accepted. Ever since Burgess and Maclean, they don't take chances."

"You said 'hardly any' doubt of suicide."

"He hanged himself with his school tie, Rand." Hastings stared into the distance at the barren trees outlined against the grey sky. "That's exactly the way Mackintosh would have done it."

"I didn't know that. It wasn't in the papers."

"Scotland Yard kept a few of the details quiet." He motioned toward a middle-aged man in a black raincoat. "Look, there's Quire, the cause of it all. He's got a nerve showing up at the funeral."

"I expect it was as much a blow to him as to you," Rand suggested gently. "Even more so, in a way. Have you checked him out?"

"No obvious Communist ties, if that's what you mean. No, the only thing out of the ordinary was some bruising on Mackintosh's neck. You know there've been cases where people were strangled and then hung up afterward."

"And it bothers you."

"It did at first. I had a go at Quire myself, since it happened in their apartment. I'd have loved to have put him away for what he did to Bill. But then he told me Bill had joined Socrates after the scandal broke."

"What's Socrates?"

Hastings glanced around to make certain none of the other mourners were within earshot. Most had already returned to the cars and were following the empty hearse out of the cemetery. "I keep forgetting you've been retired for eight years, Rand. Do you have a few minutes?"

"I have the rest of the day. Leila isn't expecting me home till dinner."

"All right. Let's stroll a bit, if you don't mind the drizzle."

After walking a few moments in silence, he resumed. "Socrates is a suicide club—like something out of Robert Louis Stevenson. The press hasn't gotten onto it yet, but I expect sooner or later it'll supply fodder for the tabloids. They have regular clubrooms in St. James's Place, and those who join desire help and support in ending their own lives. Generally they have a terminal illness, or have been

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involved in a scandal like poor old Mackintosh. The membership rolls are a closely guarded secret, but as you can imagine there's quite a turnover."

"Do they deal out a deck of cards to decide who dies, as in the Stevenson story?"

"Nothing quite so melodramatic, but they're dead serious about it, if I may say so."

"How do you know so much regarding the club? Not thinking of joining yourself, are you?" Rand asked. He was still bothered by Hastings' appearance.

"No, no—I'm good for a few years yet." He went silent once more and they continued to stroll until he decided to resume the conversation. "Truth is, Rand—and this is an official secret—Mackintosh had been using a few members of Socrates as accommodation addresses for agents in the field."

"What?"

"A bit bizarre, isn't it? The first time he told me about it, I thought he was mad. As you know, our agents in the field often need to communicate with their controls. Generally there are several alternate methods available, and it struck Mackintosh that these men and women waiting to die could supply safe mail-drops. Socrates members are usually upper class, loyal to Queen and country, and anxious to perform some useful service during the final weeks or months of their lives. Best of all, from Mackintosh's viewpoint, they would soon be gone, replaced by others. What more perfect agent contact is there than one who will soon be dead and beyond talking to anyone—friend, foe, or newsman? The addresses of the mail-drops were constantly changing and if the other side ever traced one, they found only a dead man with a grieving family."

"And the messages were then passed on to Sir William?"

Hastings nodded. "He would be at the clubrooms most afternoons to receive them."

"Then his own membership was only a cover for—"

"No. After the scandal broke, he became an authentic member. Our trouble now is that we don't know the names of those he'd recruited. When he resigned, he simply shut down the whole scheme. We're afraid there are messages in the pipeline that haven't reached us."

Rand had sworn, to himself and to Leila, never to get involved again. But he found himself asking, "Is there anything I can do?"

"I'm grateful you asked, Rand. We do need someone unofficial who

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can look into it. We certainly can't have the government taking any sort of official notice of a club like this. The opposition party would be on us for condoning suicide or euthanasia or both."

"I'll see what I can do," Rand promised. "But you must have some idea of the people he was using and paying."

Hastings shook his head. "He served as his own paymaster. Everything went through him. I'm probably the only one in the government who knew he was using Socrates members for this purpose."

"I'll talk to Quire off the record," Rand promised. "Mackintosh may have introduced him to one of the members at some time."

"I'd appreciate anything you can do."

Rand patted him on the shoulder. "Take care of yourself, Hastings. Don't let this business get you down."

The man named Quire was still living at Mackintosh's flat, and he opened the door to Rand's ring later that afternoon. He was a sandy-haired fellow in his forties, with a handsome face just beginning to harden into middle age. Rand introduced himself as a retired government employee who'd once worked with Sir William—which was perfectly true.

"You were one of those spy chaps, too?" Quire asked sardonically.

"My job was in communications. I was never a field agent."

"Well, what can I do for you?"

"I just wanted to express my regrets," Rand said.

"We all have regrets. Old Hastings was full of them. It never would have happened if the tabloid journalists hadn't hounded Bill about living with me. They took away his honor, his job, and his life."

"You've no doubt he killed himself?"

"None whatsoever. He did some sort of work with a club called Socrates. He told me about it once, how it helped prepare its members to take their own lives. The day after he resigned his government post he told me he'd joined Socrates. I tried to argue with him but it was no use. From that day on, his mind was made up."

"I'd like to contact someone in the organization if I could. He must have mentioned a name or introduced you to somebody."

"No. It was very secret. Maybe that's why it appealed to him. Bill lived with secrets all his life, so I suppose it was natural he'd want to die as part of a secret group. I have a card with their address, though. St. James's Place."

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Rand accepted the card. There was an embossed profile of Socrates in one corner. "Thank you," he said.

When he was out in the street again, he glanced up at the windows of Mackintosh's flat. He could see Quire standing behind the curtains, watching him.

The building on St. James's Place had once been a publisher's office, but it had been converted for use as clubrooms. Socrates occupied the top floor, and as Rand entered he saw only a charwoman vacuuming the carpet. He asked the way to the membership office and she eyed him a bit uncertainly before pointing a finger down the hall. "Mr. Simpson's the only one here now," she explained. "He's the president. Last door on the left."

"Just the man I came to see," Rand thanked her.

Simpson was a fat man about Rand's age. He was rotating in a swivel chair, reading through his mail, as Rand entered the office. "Membership?" he asked. "I'm afraid you'll have to call back—"

"It's about Sir William Mackintosh. I have a few questions."

"Are you police or family?"

"I used to work with him. My name is Rand. I understand Sir William came around here quite frequently before he joined your organization."

"I wouldn't say frequently. He knew some of the members, and we allow them to bring guests to our quarters. We have a very nice billiard room, and the library is well stocked. There are dining facilities, too, of course."

Rand glanced around. "Socrates is a somewhat inaccurate name for your club, Mr. Simpson. Socrates was forced to drink the hemlock as a method of execution. One cannot quite equate his death with the suicides you encourage here."

"We encourage nothing, Mr. Rand. We merely try to ease the path for those who have already decided."

"Sir William had dealings with some of them."

"I cannot talk of that."

"What is the length of membership here?"

"A week or a year, sometimes longer. We force no one to act."

"Mr. Simpson, I need the names of the people who were working with Sir William."

"That would be impossible, even if I knew them. Our membership rolls are secret. The members want it that way."

"Then why was Sir William allowed to mingle with them?"

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"As I've said, he came here originally as a guest of a member. He may have spoken to others and helped them to feel useful during their last days on earth."

"Who was the member that brought him?"

"Oh, he is long departed. His name doesn't matter."

Rand could see the direct approach was getting him nowhere. "If you change your mind, Mr. Simpson, I can be reached at this number."

"I'll certainly remember that. Good day, Mr. Rand."

At the door, Rand paused and asked, "Was there ever a hint of Sir William's homosexuality in his relations with your members?"

"Quite the opposite, I'd say. The man was a bit of a flirt with women."

Rand left the office and started back down the hall. The charwoman's back was to him and as he passed the membership office he tried the door. It was unlocked. He opened it and slipped quickly inside. The office was smaller than Simpson's and Rand went immediately to the single filing cabinet. The top drawer contained perhaps two hundred thin file folders, many of them flagged with a black metal tab. He concentrated on the untabbed folders, glancing quickly at the names: *Bates, Hatchard, Lewis, Polk, Raglan, Simpson, Torrance, West, Woodward—*

The door opened behind him. "Dear me, Mr. Rand, you seem to have gotten lost on your way out!"

There had been no time to open the folders before Simpson escorted him firmly to the door and Rand found himself in the street with nothing but the memory of a few surnames. And without the given names in each case, even the telephone directory would be of no assistance.

It was mere chance that prompted him to buy an afternoon newspaper as he waited for the train back to his home near Reading. And then he might not have noticed the news item if it hadn't been next to a review of a new book on codes and ciphers. But there it was: DEATH RULED A SUICIDE. The unfortunate man had been found hanged in his own bathroom. His name was Jack Torrance. He and his wife Madge had operated a small tobacco shop on Bayswater Road and lived in a flat a few blocks away. He'd been found dead two days earlier but the police had only now completed their investigation. His wife was grief-stricken.

Rand was remembering the names on the membership folders at

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Socrates. Torrance had been one of them, and two days ago would have been one day after Sir William's suicide. He decided to catch a later train home.

Bayswater Road ran along the north side of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. It was a busy street of shops and offices, but he had no trouble locating the Torrance Tobacco Shop. Inside, an attractive woman in her thirties was lifting a large carton of tobacco tins with the agility of a stevedore. She stowed it on the top shelf of a cabinet and asked if she could help him.

"Would Mrs. Torrance be around?" he asked.

"That's me," she said. "What can I do for you?"

"I was sorry to read about your husband. I didn't know if you'd be open so soon after the tragedy."

She faced him, her eyes searching his face.

"It hit me pretty hard at first, but I've got to get on with my life now, haven't I? We cremated poor Jack yesterday, so it's over with."

"The police took some time to establish it was suicide. Was there a suspicion of foul play?"

"What are you doing, writing this up for the Sunday papers?"

"No."

She continued to eye him suspiciously. "Then who are you?"

"A friend of Jack's. I stopped in here occasionally on my way home. My name is Rand."

"Funny he never mentioned you."

"I just read of his death today. How did it happen?"

"Hanged himself in the bathroom. With his necktie, just like that Sir William what's-his-name. The police thought at first he might have surprised a burglar in our flat, but nothing was stolen and there was no evidence of a break-in."

"But why would he want to kill himself?"

"Money problems, mostly, I suppose. And I won't pretend it was the happiest of marriages for either of us. I asked him for a separation plenty of times, and I think he was ready to give me one, but it hurt his pride."

"Did you know he belonged to a club called Socrates—a club for would-be suicides?"

The surprise on her face was genuine. "I can't believe that! You mean he was planning to kill himself all along?"

"It would seem so. Did he ever mention Sir William Mackintosh to you?"

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"No, never. I never heard of the man until that scandal broke in the papers."

"Did your husband ever receive mail from overseas? From people you didn't know?"

She thought about that. "I don't think so. But Jack picked up the mail every morning. I wouldn't really know if there was anything he didn't show me." She started rearranging some pipes on display. "You're asking a good many questions, aren't you?"

"Just as a friend."

"Sounds more like a policeman to me. Did Jack do something I don't know about?"

"I don't know," Rand answered honestly. "If I learn of anything, I'll let you know, Mrs. Torrance."

He caught the seven o'clock train back to Reading.

His report to Hastings the following day was far from satisfactory. Leila had questioned his journey to London for the second day in a row, but he felt the assignment was far from finished. He'd uncovered another death of a Socrates member, very similar to that of Sir William, but was a second suicide so unusual among members of a suicide club?

"I don't care about the suicides," Hastings grumbled. "Let them all kill themselves if they want to. Just find me the people he was using. Even one of them would help a great deal. We could find out exactly how Bill operated and if there's any danger of messages still being in the pipeline."

"Then I have to go back to Simpson, the president of Socrates. I can reach the membership only through him."

There was more activity around the Socrates clubrooms that afternoon, in preparation for a meeting in the evening. Simpson was in his office with the membership secretary, a slender, balding man named Leighton. He did not seem pleased at Rand's return and said so.

"I need to speak to your membership," Rand explained. "It's a matter concerned with government security."

Leighton also looked unhappy. "Socrates is a private club, Mr. Rand. When people join, we promise to keep their membership a secret. The very fact that they associate themselves with a club such as Socrates would be embarrassing during their final weeks."

Rand decided it was time for some threats. "Encouraging people to take their own lives could be viewed as a violation of the law."

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Simpson and Leighton exchanged glances, and the president said, "We hardly encourage people. We merely comfort them while they make their own decisions. If you imagine we sit around a table dealing out cards, as in that foolish story by Stevenson, you're quite wrong. Those who choose to leave this life do so of their own free will."

"Does anyone ever decide to live?"

Simpson gestured toward Leighton. "Our secretary came to us originally as a member. The organization gave him a reason for living and provided him with an opportunity to help others. He dropped out of the membership but has remained as a paid employee. I myself have been a member for some years, which is I why I was elected president. People come and go, but when they go it is not always to the grave."

"What are your duties?" Rand asked Leighton.

"To provide continuity," he replied. "And of course I sign up new members and keep all the records. I come by each evening after work and if there's been a death of a club member I attach a black tab to that member's file folder. We've had a number of deaths lately, as we always do when the gloomy winter weather sets in. Our membership is quite low at the present time."

"And Sir William?"

"He'd been a friend for years. The scandal and his decision to become a member of Socrates was a melancholy time for me personally."

"Was his friend Quire ever a member here?"

"No."

"Will all the membership be here for the meeting tonight?"

"Certainly not," Simpson replied. "You must realize this is not a formal organization in any sense of the term. We are here, I repeat, to comfort those who need us. They may come as often or as seldom as they choose. Some are here daily during their final weeks. Some rarely appear after they join. Perhaps they find facing others too difficult a task."

"Can I speak to those who do come? Just for a minute, before your regular meeting?"

Simpson hesitated, then said, "Please wait outside while we discuss the matter."

Rand stepped out into the carpeted hallway and paced up and down it, resisting an urge to investigate the membership files again. After a while, Simpson came out to tell him he could speak for one

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minute at the beginning of the evening's meeting. But he must not ask the members their names, not attempt to communicate with them in any way unless they chose to contact him.

"Very well," Rand agreed.

He returned to the Socrates clubrooms in the early evening and found seven men assembled there in addition to Simpson and Leighton. For the most part, they seemed elderly and infirm, and the younger ones had about them the look of lonely men for whom life had lost its meaning. To imagine Sir William recruiting even temporary help from among these people seemed bizarre to Rand, but perhaps any form of espionage attracted misfits. It was an idea he didn't want to dwell upon too closely.

Simpson announced that Rand had requested permission to speak, and he took the floor.

"I have only a minute," Rand said, "so I'll be brief. I have come here at the request of Her Majesty's Government. Most or all of you were acquainted with Sir William Mackintosh before his recent death. I believe some of you might have performed some slight services for him during the past year or two. Of course, I realize that many of the people he worked with may be deceased now, but if you did help him in any way it's most important I speak with you. I can assure you nothing will be done to learn your identities. I'll be in the billiard room for the next hour if you should wish to speak with me privately."

Rand went directly to the billiard room and waited for an hour and a half, but none of the members came to speak with him. His appeal for help had failed.

The following morning he told Hastings, "I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do. Either Sir William's recruits are all dead or else they're afraid to get involved."

"There must be something—"

Rand shook his head. "I can't browbeat a group of old, sick, lonely men who only want to die. It's not worth it. Someone else in Operations must be taking over Sir William's network. They can certainly check with the agents in the field as to any missing dispatches."

"I suppose so," Hastings admitted. "But it'll take time."

"Time is something you have plenty of. The members of Socrates don't."

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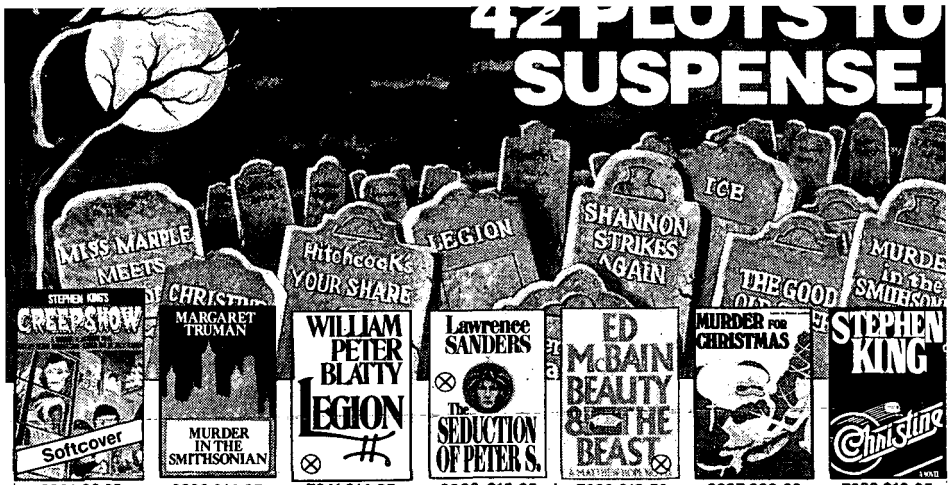

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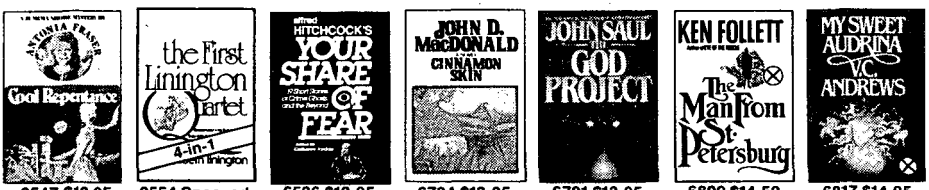

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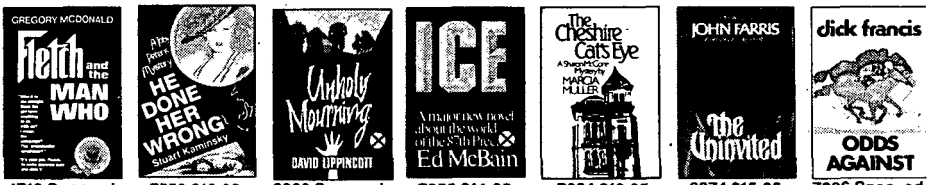

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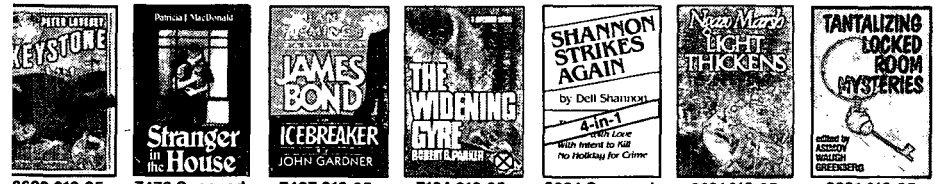

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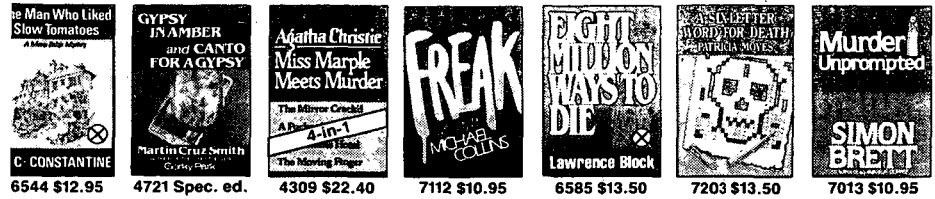

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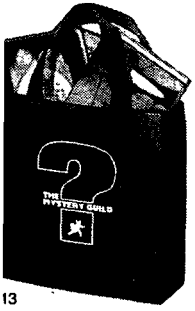

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"Misfits," Hastings grumbled, reminding Rand that he'd thought of the same word in connection with those attracted to espionage work.

"I'll be in touch, Hastings," he said. "I'm sorry I couldn't be of more help."

He left the building and thought about heading home to Leila. Three days in London had been more than enough. Still, he wondered if he might call on Quire one more time before he gave it up.

At Sir William's flat, Rand was surprised to find a moving van backed up to the front door. Quire himself, in a white turtleneck sweater, was directing the movers. "Hello. Going somewhere?" Rand asked.

"You again!" Quire shook his head. "I'm simply sick of people coming by to gape at this place, that's all. I'm getting out. I've got my own life to lead."

"What about Sir William's possessions?"

"I talked to his niece. She's going to see about them. I don't want anything of his."

There was something in his words, in his tone of voice, that surprised Rand. It was an edge of bitterness—or jealousy, perhaps. It made him remember something the president of Socrates had said.

Yes, there was only one way it could have been.

Maybe, if he was lucky, he'd find one of Mackintosh's people for Hastings after all.

He left Quire standing in the street with the movers and took the Underground across town to the Lancaster Gate station. It was the noon hour and the sidewalks were crowded with shoppers and workers on their lunch hour. The sun had come out, loosening winter's grip on the city.

He saw Madge Torrance leaving the tobacco shop and hurried to fall in step beside her. "I'm glad I caught you," he said.

"I'm on my way to lunch. What now?"

"I thought we might have a talk." He motioned across Bayswater Road. "In the park?"

"All right. If you wish."

They walked a bit before Rand began. "I was asked to investigate this matter of the Socrates Club and Sir William Mackintosh in an attempt to learn the identities of those he'd enlisted as part of an overseas communications network. Until today it seemed as if I was up against a blank wall."

"What happened today?"

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"I went to see Sir William's friend Quire again, and I was struck for the first time by the man's bitterness toward his dead friend. And I remembered something the president of Socrates had mentioned—that Sir William's homosexuality had surprised him because the man was a bit of a flirt with women. I was told on two separate occasions that both men and women belonged to Socrates, though I saw only men at a meeting there last evening. Why did you stay away, Mrs. Torrance?"

"What?"

"It was you who belonged to Socrates, not your husband."

"That's ridiculous! If Jack didn't belong to Socrates, why would he have committed suicide?"

"Exactly," Rand said.

They walked deeper into the park as Rand continued speaking. "The secretary of Socrates has a neat little system. He comes in each evening after work and attaches a black metal tab to the file folder of a newly deceased member. I saw those files, most of them with tabs, but two days after your husband's death there was still no black tab on the *Torrance* folder. I asked myself why, and of course the answer was obvious. Jack Torrance had never been a member of Socrates, so his death meant nothing to the membership secretary. The folder with *Torrance* on it was your folder, not his. That was why you looked so surprised when I said he'd been a member."

"Sometimes," she admitted, "being married to Jack was enough to drive any woman to suicide. But I couldn't just leave him. The shop was in his name. I had no money, nowhere to go."

"But after you joined Socrates it all changed, didn't it? You were the woman member Sir William flirted with. I don't know how far it went on his part, but you became convinced that he loved you. That's why you didn't kill yourself. He used you and others in his network to funnel messages from overseas agents. You did it, and you stayed alive, because you were in love. Then the scandal about Quire broke. I suppose for the first week or two you simply refused to believe it. But then you confronted Sir William, or perhaps found confirmation of his guilt through his decision to join Socrates as a member. Whatever it was, the final scene in his flat was too much for you. In your fury you killed him, bruising his neck as you throttled him, then hanging him with his necktie so it would look like suicide. You had the strength for it—I saw you lifting that carton of tobacco tins like a stevedore."

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"You've no proof for any of this insanity."

"Proof enough for me. When I first visited you, I remember your telling me your husband hanged himself with his necktie, just like Sir William. But none of the papers mentioned the necktie part. You only knew it because you were there, because you killed him."

She gave a little gasp of breath and an odd look crossed her face. "All right, I killed him. The next day at home I was still half crazy. Jack knew something was wrong and he accused me of being with another man. I killed him, too. I don't know why, except that somehow he was the cause of it all."

"Tell me about the work you did for Sir William," Rand asked.

"Can I make a deal about that?"

"What sort of a deal?"

She told him. Then they walked for a while longer, as she told him about the letters from Europe.

Hastings put down the report with a smile. It seemed to Rand that he looked better already. "This is what we needed. I knew you'd come through for me. With whom did you talk?"

"One of the Socrates people."

"All right, no names. I suppose we don't need them now that we know the details of Bill's operation. What about Socrates?"

Rand shrugged. "A closed chapter."

"I see there was another suicide overnight. A woman named Madge Torrance. Her husband killed himself just a few days back. Do you think she was a member of Socrates?"

"I'm sure of it," Rand said. He was thinking of Leighton, in the secretary's office, affixing a black metal tab to yet another file folder.

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a *NEW* short story by

CLARK HOWARD

Edward detested having to leave the warmth of his Barbados home for the cool, thin air of Canada; detested the long airplane trips, the waits for luggage, the tasteless food and pre-mixed drinks. Most of all, he detested being away from his girls, hated missing for even one evening the hour before bedtime when they usually gravitated to his study one by one in their pajamas and robes, to "bother" him while he was working on the plantation books. Not that there was that much bookwork to do any more. Everything was debits nowadays . . .

IN OUT OF THE COLD

by CLARK HOWARD

Edward Harmon picked up his visitor at Grantly Adams Airport and drove on the Atlantic side of the island on the way home. His visitor, whose name was Caldwell, had traveled a good part of the world, but this was his first trip to Barbados. Looking at the long stretch of white sand next to the highway, he asked, "Why are the beaches deserted? Is tourism down?"

"No, it's up a few points actually," Edward said. "There's just too much riptide here on the Atlantic side to swim. The beaches on the Caribbean side get all the activity."

"Does Claudette Colbert still live on the island?"

"Yes."

"Ever see her?"

"A couple of times a month."

"I always liked her." Caldwell stared at the dashboard for a moment, as if memorizing, then said, "We were all terribly sorry to

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hear about Elaine. Nothing could have been done for her, I don't imagine?"

"Thank you. No, by the time she was diagnosed it had got into her bone marrow to such an extent it was irreversible. All we could do was make her as comfortable as possible until the end."

"How did the girls take it?"

"Surprisingly well. I think the three of them decided they had to bear up so that I wouldn't break down. Incidentally, now that she's sixteen, Becky is no long Becky. She's Rebecca now."

"I'll remember that," Caldwell promised.

It took them only ten minutes to get from the airport to the road that led onto Harmon's small sugar-cane estate. On an island fourteen miles wide and twenty-one miles long, one never spent much time getting from place to place. Edward's estate was modest—an eight-room house on two acres of lovely, cultivated grounds surrounded by 160 acres of prime sugar-cane field. He had been in the sugar-cane business for eight years and a widower for four. At forty-four, he was fit from doing field work himself. The grey in his hair had only come within the past year, with the knowledge that he was slowly going bankrupt. Caldwell's visit, he imagined, would bring on a few more grey strands. Edward still owed Caldwell one job, and he was reasonably certain that was what Caldwell was here for.

At the house, Caldwell was properly welcomed by Rebecca Harmon, who had assumed her late mother's place as mistress of the estate. When Caldwell saw her, he was astonished. "My God, Edward, you've sired an absolute beauty," he said.

"Thank you, Mr. Caldwell," Rebecca said quietly. "It's a pleasure to see you again. How are Mrs. Caldwell and Emily?"

"Both well, thank you, Rebecca. Both send their love. Emily's off to Bryn Mawr in the fall." He looked around. "Where are your sisters? They're probably such young ladies that I won't recognize them."

"You may not recognize them, but it won't be because they're young ladies," Rebecca said dryly. "They're more easily mistaken for field hands."

As if that was their cue, the younger Harmon girls, Amanda and Amy, twelve-year-old twins, bounded into the room and approached their visitor with tanned, smiling faces and exuberant hellos.

"Well, my goodness," said Caldwell, getting a hug from each, "you two haven't changed a bit except you're taller. I've something in my

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bag for each of you from Mrs. Caldwell, but you'll have to wait until dinner for it because I'm too tired to unpack just now."

Rebecca mixed gin-and-tonics for the men, a non-alcoholic drink for herself, and opened lime sodas for her sisters. The girls were allowed to join Edward and Caldwell on the verandah and visit for fifteen minutes, then they were excused so that the men could talk.

"I suppose you've guessed why I'm here," Caldwell said when they were alone.

Edward nodded. "I owe you one."

"Yes. If it were up to me, you understand, I'd close the books on it, call us even. But you know how the Director is. Everything has to balance or he can't sleep nights."

"I sometimes wonder how *anyone* connected with the agency can sleep nights," Edward said. "No offense."

"No. We all have our values and priorities in life. *You* slept well, I presume, during your nine years with us."

"I suppose I must have," Edward admitted.

"Of course you did. And the Director will catch up on his sleep when we settle up this little deficit of yours. As I recall, your last contract was for six jobs, and we let you leave after five. That's when you had the opportunity to buy this sugar-cane estate. I remember distinctly the Director saying, 'Let's let Harmon off the hook so he won't miss this opportunity to buy that place in Barbados. He's a good man; he'll pay us the one job he owes us when the time comes.' So, to use LeCarré's suitable little phrase, we let you come in out of the cold. But now it's time to balance the books." There was the faintest trace of challenge in Caldwell's tone when he added, "Do you have any problem with that, Edward?"

Harmon shook his head. "No. As far as I'm concerned, the quicker we're even, the better. Where's the job located?"

"Montreal."

"At least it isn't in Europe. I hate Europe. It's always so cold, even in summer. I presume this is a diplomatic job. I only do—or did—diplomatic work, remember?"

"Yes, it's diplomatic. A Turkish embassy aide."

"Has enough time passed since—?"

"Yes, of course. Nearly three years. We still have the same waiting period to protect the State Department. Can you fly back with me tomorrow?"

"Yes, I suppose so." Edward gazed out over his ripe sugar-cane

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fields. "No big hurry to harvest this year. The crop hasn't been sold. It probably won't be."

"Why on earth not?" Caldwell asked, surprised.

Edward sighed. "The world sugar market. It has been slowly but steadily depressing for several years now. Nearly every week there are a dozen new sugar-free products on the market: sugar-free colas, sugar-free cereal, sugar-free this, sugar-free that. Sugar, as far as the health experts are concerned, has become a villain. Suddenly the word 'sweet' has become an expletive. I almost expect Valentine's Day to be cancelled."

"But surely *someone* will buy your crop," Caldwell said. "Surely it won't just rot in the field."

"No? It did last year."

Caldwell was incredulous. "How in the world do small growers like yourself survive?"

"Some *don't*. Two estates have sold out to land developers already. And not at a profit, either. The buyers know we're in a tight spot here and they're paying rock-bottom prices. Several growers are converting their land to peanuts, but that's very costly."

"How costly? For a place the size of yours, for instance?"

"I couldn't do it for under a hundred thousand."

Caldwell whistled. "That *is* costly." He pursed his lips in thought for a moment, then said, "You know, Edward, if you wanted to come back—"

"No, thank you," Edward said quickly.

"We could always use you. And you wouldn't have to go to Europe, either. There's a backlog of work here in our own hemisphere. There's an Angolan diplomat now assigned to Mexico City who's almost due. And a Moroccan now in Caracas we're taking as a favor to another department—"

"I appreciate the offer," Edward cut in, "but no. I'm out and I'm staying out. And I don't think you should be telling me about anyone except my own man."

"You're right," Caldwell said.

For the balance of Caldwell's visit, the two men refrained from discussing business.

The next day, Edward and Caldwell put their bags into a taxi Edward had summoned, said goodbye to the children, and Edward instructed the driver to take them first to Bridgetown, the island's

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only town of any size. "Just one quick stop on the way to the airport," he told Caldwell.

"What excuse did you give the girls for the trip?" Caldwell asked quietly on the drive to town.

"I said I had to testify on an old matter that was coming to trial."

"Very good," Caldwell approved. The taxi slowed suddenly, jolting the passengers a little. The driver stuck his head out the window and cursed a small furry animal that scurried across the highway. "What on earth was that?" Caldwell asked.

Edward smiled slightly. "A mongoose. We bring them over from Jamaica to kill the rats and snakes in the cane fields before we go in to harvest." His smile faded. "Another year or two and our taxi drivers won't have to worry about them. There won't *be* any cane fields."

Presently they approached the edge of Bridgetown. First came an area of small concrete-block homes with corrugated roofs, wooden doors, and wooden shutters on all the windows. Then they passed several blocks of large Victorian homes with manicured lawns, shaded by giant mahogany trees. In the market district, Caldwell was dazzled by the sight of many large black women wearing bright dresses and straw hats, selling mangoes, paw-paw, and a wide variety of other edibles from street stalls. Other women, those without stalls, had baskets of produce on their heads, balanced expertly.

As the car entered the main commercial section, they passed a statue of Lord Nelson. Edward had the driver stop at the Banc du Belgium. "I'll be just a minute," he said.

He entered the bank and went directly to a desk next to the large street window where a pretty mulatto woman was working on some papers. Her desk plate read: JANINE DYCE, TRUST DEPT.

"Hello, Edward," she said, smiling up at him. "Did you prepare the girls for me?"

"Yes. I really appreciate this, Jan. Such short notice and all." He was aware that Caldwell could see them from the waiting taxi.

"How did Rebecca take it?" Janine asked.

"The usual way. She thinks she's old enough to manage without you. I'm afraid she might be surly."

"Not for long," Janine promised. "I have a new hairstyle book from Paris. I shall win her over with French fashion. Of course, you may not recognize her when you get back. What about the twins?"

"Oh, they're delighted, little devils. They'd rather mind *anyone* than their big sister, and they adore you." He handed her a slip of

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paper with Caldwell's name and private telephone number in Washington on it. "You can reach me through this man if anything comes up."

Janine rose and walked him back to the street door. She was an extremely shapely woman, wearing a sleeveless white dress that fit snugly top and bottom. Her dark hair was swept back to keep her neck cool. Like most other female office workers in Bridgetown, she wore no hosiery. Edward knew that Caldwell was probably observing Janine with a good deal of interest as he said goodbye at the door and returned to the taxi.

"Extraordinary-looking woman," Caldwell commented on the way to the airport. "Not all native, I take it."

"Her father was Welsh," Edward told him. "He ran a fishing boat, did a little liquor-smuggling on the side."

"Is she your—that is, are you serious about her? If I'm prying, just say so."

"No, you're not prying," Edward said, even though Caldwell was. "Jan and I have talked about marriage. We've decided to wait until Rebecca is a little older. There's some friction there. Not that it matters much any more. With the value of holding plummeting the way it is, I can't think about marriage."

"Pity," Caldwell said. "Striking woman."

They took the noon Pan Am flight to Miami. Over drinks, Caldwell talked about how quickly one's children grow up. It seemed only yesterday, he mused, that his daughter Emily had been playing dolls with Edward's daughter Rebecca, and now Emily would soon be at Bryn Mawr. It was the third or fourth time Caldwell had seen fit to remind Edward that Emily would be going to an exclusive, expensive college. He couldn't have made his point any better if he had added "Poor Rebecca" to his comments.

At Miami International, they laid over an hour, then took an Eastern flight on to Washington. On that two-hour flight, Caldwell talked about a house in Georgetown his wife Grace had her eye on. It was larger than the one they were in and had a rose garden, even a small wine cellar. Naturally there was an outrageous price on it. Caldwell supposed they'd buy it, though. After all, it was only money.

Yes, Edward thought, money you have because you stayed with the agency, money I don't have because I didn't. Money you have because you played it smart and opted for the security, money I don't

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have because I bought a sugar-cane plantation, looking for peace of mind. He listened to Caldwell tell him in a dozen different ways that he was a fool. When he'd finally had enough of it, he closed his eyes and pretended to doze.

At National Airport, Caldwell asked, "Are you sure you won't stay over for the night? Grace would love to see you again."

"I'd like to see her, too," Edward lied, "but I think I'd better get on with the job while I'm psyched up for it. You understand."

"Of course. We'll go right to the office then."

Caldwell's offices were in a large building on 15th Street. The lettering on the door read simply: CAPITOL DIRECTORY EXCHANGE. In a large outer office, the walls were covered floor to ceiling with bookcases, the shelves of which were filled with telephone directories and street guides from virtually every major city in the world. By day, two cover agents, both women, both multilingual, staffed the office and ostensibly handled requests for information from the directories. Actually, they were code clerks, decoding class-three transmissions, low priority and non-secret, brought to them by a messenger every morning.

Caldwell's private office was behind the first one, and it was there that he and Edward went when they arrived from the airport. From his safe, Caldwell selected a file folder and handed it to Edward. Without looking at its contents, Edward put it into his briefcase. Then Caldwell handed him a small leather case about the size of a paperback novel. Edward examined it, impressed.

"These cases used to be plastic," he observed.

"I like to upgrade things when the operating budget permits," Caldwell said smugly. "These make very nice little shave kits when you're done with them. Is there anything else you need in the way of equipment?"

"No, this will do," Edward said.

"Will you be stopping by on your way back?"

"Probably not."

"You'll call me, then?"

"Yes. Same number?"

"Same number, same phone line, sanitized every twenty-four hours," Caldwell confirmed. He held out his hand. "Good luck, old man. Not that you'll need it. Not you. One of the very best, that's how I always think of you. And if you ever decide to come back, as I told you yesterday—"

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"Thanks," Edward said, shaking hands.
He left as quickly as he could inoffensively do so.

Back at National, Edward was able to get on a Delta flight directly to Montreal, with a short stop in Boston. He had a drink, picked at the in-flight dinner he was served, finally left most of it, and ordered another drink. Even after leaving Boston, when there was no further food service, no movie, nothing going on in first-class to occupy his attention, even when the seat next to him was vacant and he had all the privacy he could have asked for, Edward still did not open his briefcase and study the file Caldwell had given him.

All he knew about the man in Montreal was that he was a diplomatic aide in the Turkish legation. That, of course, could mean anything—a multitude of diplomatic transgressions often came in the form of an "aide." The man might be an Intelligence agent, a high-ranking military officer, a scientist, a cryptanalyst, even an assassin. Edward hadn't kept up with world politics much since leaving the agency, but he did recall from his previous training that Turkey had iron and steel interests, chemical and oil-refining interests, and had been expanding its already broad tobacco interests. So Ankara had quite a lot to protect—its diplomatic "aides" might be anything.

But Edward wasn't interested in any details about the man at the moment. Even though he had resigned himself to the job at hand and knew he owed it to the agency—and had known all along that someday the agency would collect—he nevertheless detested having to do it. He detested having to leave the warmth of his Barbados home for the cool, thin air of Canada; detested the long airplane trips, the waits for luggage, the tasteless food and pre-mixed drinks. Most of all, he detested being away from his girls, hated missing even for one evening the hour before bedtime when they usually gravitated to his study one by one in their pajamas and robes, to "bother" him while he was working on the planatation books.

Not that there was that much bookwork to do any more. Everything was debits nowadays—no cash flow, no contracts, no harvest or delivery dates, just a constant stream of outgoing cash, slowly depleting his savings. But no matter how bleak the day had been, Edward's spirits were always bolstered by that last hour before their bedtime which his daughters devoted exclusively to him. It was then that he learned so much about them, so many facets of their makeup that he might easily have missed. Rebecca's concern that her thighs

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were too heavy. Amy's unusual interest in animals and her growing desire to become a veterinarian. Amanda's still frequent dreams about her dead mother. During that hour in the evening, they seemed to discuss more openly those matters which they kept to themselves the rest of the time.

The girls had Janine to sit around and "bother" tonight, Edward mused as he stared at his own reflection in the plane window. They would probably all be having bedtime tea and cookies in the large guest bedroom where Janine would sleep while he, several thousand miles away, would be alone in some hotel room. He doubted he would close his eyes the entire night.

Thinking of Janine, Edward hoped that she and Rebecca would soon learn to get along. It was jealousy, of course, that caused Rebecca to act the way she did toward Janine. Elaine, Edward's late wife, and Janine had been close friends almost from the time the Harmons had settled on the island. While she was growing up, Rebecca had been fond of her mother's friend. It was only after Elaine's untimely death that Rebecca's attitude had changed. Suddenly, with her mother out of the picture, Rebecca seemed to feel that Janine was an intruder.

Edward supposed the feeling was justified. The girls had seemed to know instinctively when he and Janine, about six months after the funeral, had become intimate. From Rebecca's point of view, he supposed that was a threat, and an unfair one at that: Janine had a way to gain favor with Edward that she herself, Rebecca, did not. It didn't bother Amy or Amanda that Janine occasionally stayed over on the weekend. But to Rebecca it was a disgrace. *She* was mistress of the estate now—she planned the meals, oversaw the household help, and paid the domestic wages. Even during the school year, she got up early every weekday morning so she would have time to take care of her household duties before leaving for classes. Everything about the house functioned perfectly well under her direction. Janine wasn't needed at all—except by her father. For the one thing that his eldest daughter could not provide.

Janine assured Edward that as Rebecca matured, the situation would become less of a problem. "As soon as she meets the right young man and goes to bed with him," Janine said, "she'll forget about what you and I are doing and concentrate on what she and he are doing. It will resolve itself—you'll see."

For a long time, Edward had hoped Janine was right. He had longed for the day when they could marry and he would have a

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complete family again. Now, however, with the world sugar market so depressed, there was little hope of that. He couldn't very well invite a woman to wed into bankruptcy.

When the plane finally landed at Dorval International outside Montreal, Edward passed through a cursory Canadian immigrations check and proceeded to the baggage-claim area. While he waited for his one suitcase, he used the courtesy phones to check around for a room. He located one at the Meridien in the Complexe Desjardins and reserved it. When his bag appeared on the luggage carousel, he claimed it, walked past a Customs agent in the Nothing to Declare lane, and found a taxi.

It was near midnight now and the usual forty-minute ride downtown was reduced to twenty-five by the light traffic. By half past midnight, Edward was checked into his room. By one he was unpacked, had showered and taken a Tagamet for his ulcer, and was in bed. By five past one, the man who doubted he would close his eyes that night was fast asleep.

He slept nine hours. When the sound of the maid vacuuming in the hall woke him up, he thought something was wrong with his watch. Only after he called the desk and verified the time did he believe it. It was the travel, he told himself. And the drinks on the three planes. And, a little perhaps, his age. Forty-four wasn't thirty-six.

He ordered breakfast in the room and showered and shaved while waiting for it. When it arrived, he had the waiter set it up next to the window. From where he ate, he could look down into busy Ste. Catherine's Street. He ate slowly, leisurely—to his surprise, enjoying the food. Then, pouring himself a fresh cup of coffee, he brought out the file Caldwell had given him and began studying it. A Montreal street map was included in the folder, and whenever Edward came to an address in what he was reading he located it on the map and marked it for reference in relation to where his hotel was situated.

The subject of the folder was one Gole Burgaz, who had been assigned for the past two years to the Turkish legation as a diplomatic aide. He had formerly held the same post at the Turkish Embassy in Washington for three years. Edward found and marked the legation's address on the Boul de Maisonneuve. Burgaz lived alone in a small apartment on the Avenue Lorne. He was known to frequent the Bluenose seafood restaurant on Place Ville Marie, Ruby

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Foo's Chinese restaurant on Decarie Boulevard, and the Le Fadeau bar on Claude Street. Edward carefully found and marked the approximate location of each on his map.

When he turned to the personal page on the subject, Edward saw that Gole Burgaz was thirty-six, five feet nine, one hundred and forty-five pounds. His hair was black, complexion olive. Nose hooked. Prominent ears. Thick brows. Usually dressed in sportcoats and slacks instead of a business suit. Bought most of his clothes at Four Seasons Menswear on Sherbrooke Street West. Family status in Turkey was unknown. Believed to be a graduate of the Turkish State College of Mines at Bafra.

A metallurgist, Edward thought. Probably involved in securing and smuggling stolen gold out of Canada to his own country. No doubt he had performed similar duties while posted in Washington. Edward studied three photographs of Burgaz: one a copy of his diplomatic passport photo on file with the State Department, another an ID photo from a federal driver's license application, the third an enlargement of a telephoto shot taken of him leaving his embassy in Washington. He was not a particularly sinister-looking man—except around his eyes.

Sitting back and finishing his coffee, Edward decided he would try a direct approach first, at Burgaz's apartment. It was Thursday. A high percentage of people stayed home on Thursday night, allegedly because that same high percentage planned to go out socially on Friday night. If, Edward thought hopefully, he could make the contact at Burgaz's apartment, it might very well be possible to complete his distasteful assignment the first day and be done with it. What a piece of luck that would be. Get back home after only two nights away. Glancing at his watch, he saw that it was a little after eleven. Plenty of time, he thought, to make his preparations.

He braced himself. "All right," he said firmly, aloud, "let's go. Get the goddamned thing over with."

At eight-thirty that evening, Edward parked a rented car in the next block down from Gole Burgaz's apartment building on Avenue Lorne. He was careful to park where there were already a number of other cars on both sides of the street. The car he had rented was a black Renault, one of the most common vehicles on Montreal streets.

On the front seat beside Edward was a package in the shape of, but slightly larger than, a square hatbox. It was wrapped in brown

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paper and tied with twine. A hand-lettered label on its top bore Burgaz's name and address. Edward was now wearing a grey deliveryman's jacket which he had purchased, along with a cap, at a uniform shop that afternoon. Above the bill of the cap was a cloth patch which read: DELIVERY SERVICE. .

Without pausing in the car even for a minute, Edward took the package, got out, and—in case anyone was casually watching him—walked in the direction *away* from the Burgaz apartment building. He went all the way around two blocks and approached Burgaz's building from the opposite corner. Anyone seeing him enter the building would not have seen him get out of the car, and vice versa. In the building's small foyer, he quickly scanned the row of bells and pressed the one marked: 2C—G. BURGAZ. A moment later, a voice asked through the intercom, "Yes? Who is it, please?"

"Delivery service, sir," said Edward. "Package for Mr. Gole Burgaz."

"Package? For me? Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Gole Burgaz."

"Who is it from?" the voice asked. There was now a trace of suspicion in its tone.

"Just a moment, sir. I'll have to check my bill of lading—" Edward made a few rustling sounds with the brown paper in which the package was wrapped. "It's from Four Seasons Menswear, sir," he announced.

"I don't remember ordering anything from them. Anyway, why would you be delivering at this time of night?"

"We deliver up until ten P.M., sir." Now Edward put a deliberate edge of irritability into his voice. "Do you want me to take it back, sir?"

Silence. Thinking. Waiting. Then: "All right, bring it up."

A buzzer release sounded on the inside door and Edward pushed through it. On the way up to the second floor, he held the package against his chest with his left hand and put his right hand into his coat pocket. He worked a hard-rubber pressure injection ring onto his right index finger. The hard-rubber circle that fit around the top joint of his finger covered a soft-rubber tube which contained a quantity of liquid chlorpromazine. On the underside of the band, next to Edward's palm, was a small hypodermic needle. The slightest pressure from Edward's thumb on the side of the band would cause the tube to act as a syringe and force the chlorpromazine through the hollow needle. Edward had the ring in place by the time he walked

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up to the door of apartment 2C. Gole Burgaz was standing in the open door waiting for him. Edward smiled as he walked up and asked, "Mr. Burgaz? Here you are, sir."

Burgaz had to take the box with both hands—it was too large to do otherwise. As he did so, Edward quickly raised his right hand to the Turk's neck and pressed the needle into his sternohyoid muscle, releasing the chlorpromazine. Burgaz immediately dropped the package and jumped back, which was exactly what Edward wanted him to do. Edward stepped into the apartment and closed the door behind them.

"Who are you?" Burgaz asked nervously. He began to tremble.

Edward smiled a tight, wry little smile. "I'm a diplomatic aide, like yourself."

Burgaz backed away, his trembling increasing. He put a hand on his neck. "What did you do to me?"

"I injected you with a drug used to treat violent schizophrenics. At the moment you're losing control of your muscles. I'd sit down if I were you."

Burgaz paled and looked down at his knees as they buckled slightly. His body seemed to weave and go slack.

"You really had better sit down," Edward warned. As he was speaking, he was doing other things—taking off the deliveryman's coat and cap and folding them neatly together, unwrapping the package he'd brought with him, opening the box it contained, and removing its contents: an attaché case, a neatly folded suitcoat which matched the trousers he was wearing, a necktie to go with his open-collared white shirt, a hat, and the small leather case Caldwell had given him the previous evening.

Opening the case, he removed the hypodermic ring and placed it carefully in a pocket next to a vial of chlorpromazine. Watching as Burgaz staggered to a chair and sat down heavily, Edward put the leather case, the folded deliveryman's coat, and the cap into the attaché case, then collapsed the box and put it and the wrapping paper in on top of the other articles. Closing the attaché case, he set it by the door.

After locating the bathroom, Edward returned and helped Burgaz to his feet. "Come on now, up we go. That's a good fellow."

Burgaz's head flopped about weakly. He tried to speak but his words were slurred and disconnected. "What—me—can't—who—"

"Into the bathroom," Edward said, as much to himself as to Burgaz.

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In the bathroom, Edward carefully lowered the helpless man into the tub. Starting with Burgaz's shoes, he began undressing him. As he did, he spoke quietly and matter-of-factly to him.

"You have no muscle coordination, Burgaz, and you can't speak too well or shout, but I know that your mind is completely alert and you are fully aware of what is happening. So I'm going to tell you *why* it's happening.

"Nearly three years ago, when you were posted in Washington, you abducted a little eight-year-old black girl from a public playground. You took her to your apartment and for five hours you molested and sexually abused her. The police caught you but you couldn't be punished—you had full diplomatic credentials and under the diplomatic immunity agreement between nations you couldn't be prosecuted. The police were required by international law to release you to the Turkish embassy. Your government subsequently transferred you to the legation here in Montreal."

Edward had the limp man stripped of his outer clothing now and proceeded to remove his underwear. He put all the clothes in a pile next to the tub. When Burgaz was naked, Edward raised each of his knees and slid his head and torso down into the tub.

"That little girl you molested has been in a psychiatric hospital ever since. She has terrible nightmares about you. Doctors don't know if she'll ever be the same again."

Burgaz watched in wide-eyed terror as Edward closed the bathtub drain.

"The government of the United States has decreed that you should be punished for your crime against that child, irrespective of your diplomatic immunity. I've been sent here to carry out that punishment."

Edward turned on the water in the tub.

"Goodbye, Burgaz."

The next morning, on an Air Canada 747 non-stop flight to Miami, Edward reflected that paying the agency the job he had owed it had not been such a trying experience after all. Mostly it had been the thinking about it that had been so bad. The job itself had gone remarkably well. There had been no problem at all leaving Burgaz's apartment. Edward had simply put on the necktie, suitcoat, and hat, picked up the attaché case, and left. Anyone who had seen a deliveryman enter the building would have seen a businessman leave. Outside, instead of turning in the direction from which the deliv-

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eryman had come, Edward walked directly toward the next block where the Renault was parked. Minutes later, he was gone. It had been one of his smoothest jobs ever. It was oddly satisfying to know that he was still good at it.

When he got to Miami International Airport that afternoon, Edward claimed his bag and rechecked it on a three o'clock BWIA flight to Barbados. He used the time between flights to buy souvenir T-shirts for his daughters and Janine, then got a handful of quarters and found a phonebooth from which to place a call to Caldwell's sanitized private number in Washington.

"The assignment's completed," he reported.

"Really?" said Caldwell. Edward could picture his eyebrows going up. "But I don't know why I'm surprised," Caldwell admitted, "you always were one of the best. Did you know, Edward, that I never graded you less than Excellent on your quarterly fitness report? More often than not, it was Outstanding."

"No, I never knew that," Edward replied.

"Edward," Caldwell insisted, "you *must* consider coming back to us. Listen, I'll personally guarantee no European assignments. We have more than enough work right here in this hemisphere to keep you busy for at least two years."

"No, I'd never come back," Edward interrupted. "That's final."

"Never say never, my boy," Caldwell chided. Edward remained silent. Finally Caldwell sighed in disappointment. "All right, Edward. It's your decision."

"We're even now, right?"

"Even, yes. Listen, stay in touch at least. Christmas cards, that sort of thing. For old time's sake—"

"Goodbye, Caldwell," Edward said, and hung up.

The BWIA flight got Edward back to Barbados at seven-thirty. Twilight was just beginning to settle over the island. As Edward waited in the open-air baggage-claim area, he breathed in the warm, fragrant breeze that, as usual, was blowing gently in from the west. From nearby trees, he could hear the cooing and cawing of night birds. A few minutes later, he was in a taxi, riding along the Atlantic side of the island. There was no sun left on that side, but it was still light enough to see white waves breaking on white sand. From the island side of the highway came the unique smell of flying fish being fried somewhere.

As the taxi neared Bridgetown, it passed a few small outdoor bars

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where people were sipping colorful fruit drinks or Banks malt liquor by dancing lantern light. Someone was strumming a guitar—a slow calypso love song. Edward thought of Janine—her dark hair piled high, her wide, frank eyes and smooth brown body. He thought of his daughters and how much they loved the island. He thought of his sugar-cane fields and how they would look converted to peanut plants. He thought of Elaine, buried in the island cemetery, and how hard she had worked to help them make their start there.

It was too much to give up.

"Stop at the telephone exchange in town, driver," Edward instructed.

He placed the call from a private booth and had it charged to his home number. Caldwell answered on the second ring.

"You were right," Edward said. "Never say never."

At the other end of the line, Caldwell laughed softly.

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a *NEW* Grijpstra-de Gier story by

JANWILLEM van de WETERING

The dead lady's name was Ravelaar, de Gier told Grijpstra. "Mr. Ravelaar's a lawyer and he's coming as fast as he can in an orange baby Citroen. The neighbor says they're both sinners. Mrs. lived in the house and her husband in the servants' quarters. Mrs. was as mad as a hatter and Mr.'s not much better . . ."

THERE GOES RAVELAAR

by JANWILLEM van de WETERING

It was a summer afternoon. The sun shone freshly through the mist. An old Volkswagen beetle grumbled cheerfully around the curves of the Amsteldijk, heading out of Amsterdam but still close to the center. The driver, a tall wide-shouldered man with curly hair and a bushy moustache, watched ducks fly in low over the river as his passenger, an older man, came awake with a start.

"Are we going somewhere?"

"The radio reported a fire and a body."

"Far from here?"

"Getting close."

Sergeant de Gier, attached to the felony squad of the Amsterdam Municipal Police, eased his foot from the gas pedal and pointed. A goose was drifting quietly through the reeds, its neck tucked sleepily back between the curling feathers of its wings. "Look, isn't that something for you? Swam right out of one of Hondecoeter's paintings."

"Not now," said Adjutant Grijpstra, "I'm working." The adjutant looked before him, at the soot-black cloud rising from the trees around the next bend in the road. "There's a body smouldering in that mess?"

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De Gier swerved right to give a fire engine room to pass, maneuvered around a sloppily parked patrol car, and braked. A patrolman stood planted in front of a wrought-iron gate, blocking their way.

The adjutant got out of the car. "It's just us, your friendly neighborhood detectives."

"Accident?" asked de Gier.

"Murder!" the patrolman cried.

"Now, now," said Grijpstra, crunching across the gravel driveway. He stared at the flaming ruins with wonder. "What a beautiful house."

"Not now," said the patrolman.

"They'll do a beautiful restoration, mark my words. Prettier than it ever was before. One of those old square houses, gussied up with a few frills here and there. Sixteenth Century—they're good at those these days."

"One side!" firemen growled. "There's more equipment coming through, would you move your junker?"

De Gier drove the Volkswagen through the gate. A red truck thundered past the little car. Firemen with red faces under shining helmets unrolled hoses.

"What do you mean, murder?" asked the adjutant, pulling the patrolman aside.

"*Bam!*" the patrolman shouted. "That's what we heard, me and my mate. We were driving along the dike and suddenly, *whoosh*, the windows all blew out. We turned back and rushed into the house, but the lady was already dead. In pieces. On the ceiling, the walls. She was everywhere."

"Where, in the kitchen?"

The patrolman waved his arms.

"Gas range," said the adjutant. "Happens all the time. Lady turns on the gas, but the pilot light's not sparking right. She goes off and the kitchen fills up with gas and she lights a cigarette and—" The adjutant pointed at the flames licking from the windows. "That's what you get."

"No no no!" the patrolman disagreed. "She was in the living room. There was a bomb, I heard it myself."

"You heard an explosion. What else did you see inside?"

"A bomb," said the patrolman. "God, people are rotten."

"That they are," said Grijpstra. "*Bam* and a dead lady. Anything else to report?"

"A cat," said the patrolman. "The fire was already spreading but

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not so bad yet, so me and my mate went in. There was a fireplace, with a cat blown out of its basket up the chimney. We could hear it howling. I caught ahold of its tail, but I couldn't pull it down."

Another patrolman was talking with a woman. The woman hurried off. De Gier hurried after her.

"Who was that?" Grijpstra asked the second patrolman.

"Neighbor lady, heard the explosion. Going home to call Mr. Ravelaar's office. The deader inside is Mrs. Ravelaar."

"The dirty bastards," said the first patrolman. "They can't do that, Adjutant, just blow up a lady like that."

Grijpstra moved off, out of range of the smoke. De Gier came hurrying back.

"Any wiser, Sergeant?"

"The dead lady's name was Ravelaar," said de Gier, "and the cat in the chimney is Max. Mr. Ravelaar's a lawyer and he's coming as fast as he can in an orange baby Citroen. The neighbor says they're both sinners. Mrs. lived in the house and her husband in the servants' quarters. Mrs. was as mad as a hatter and Mr.'s not much better."

"Let's walk a bit," said Grijpstra.

The wind blew the smoke toward the river. Adjutant and sergeant walked the other way, into the park behind the burning house. It was quiet there.

"Those are very old poplars," said de Gier. "What a place to live! Do you suppose that's the servants' quarters?"

Grijpstra opened the door. "Garage. Contents: one Mercedes."

"And a flight of stairs." De Gier looked up. "At the top, an apartment. Mr.'s?"

They walked on. "Rock garden," said de Gier. "Rose garden. Greenhouse full of orchids. This is luxury. Look, a gazebo. That must be where the blissful couple enjoyed tea and crumpets together."

"The blissful couple didn't enjoy *anything* together," said Grijpstra. "They weren't blissful, unless the neighbor lady's making it all up. Nicely trimmed lawn. Greek statues set in niches along a privet hedge. I didn't know they still did that. And all for two people."

"Bah," said de Gier.

"Bah what?"

"Filthy mess here all of a sudden. One decaying stream with collapsed decorative bridge. Stinks, doesn't it?"

Grijpstra rubbed his chin.

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"Thinking?" asked de Gier.

"I've been thinking all along."

"You were sleeping in the car."

"Strange," said Grijpstra. "Why've they let this go to seed? The whole park is nice and neat: blooming roses, trimmed hedges, new-mown lawn, not a weed in sight, the paths raked. And then this one forgotten corner. Why? A pretty stream would have been pleasant here. With birds."

"They had birds here once," said de Gier. "See the coops?" He gestured dreamily. "Geese with curling feathers, Chinese ducks, cranes, flamingoes if need be. That's all part of an estate like this. Ah, the glory of tradition." He clapped Grijpstra on the shoulder. "Don't you recognize the setting? This is where the old masters created their famous canvases. Just like you've been doing."

"Don't make jokes," said Grijpstra.

De Gier's hand was still on Grijpstra's shoulder, stroking soothingly now. "I mean it, Adjutant, you've got talent. That peacock you created last Sunday—"

"It's a shame," said Grijpstra, "to let a stream like this go bad. Look at it. Algae and duckweed, a stinking pool. This Ravelaar should be ashamed of himself."

A patrolman ran across the grass, bringing the smell of smoke with him. "Can you come back now? The fire chief wants to talk with you." Flakes of ash drifted from his uniform onto Grijpstra's suit, which wasn't in such good shape anyway from too much steam-cleaning.

Grijpstra coughed and tried to brush the ash from his suit. "Where *is* the chief?"

"In the house," said the patrolman. "The fire's pretty much out."

"How's Max?" asked de Gier.

The patrolman shuddered. "He came out of the chimney like a fireball."

"And now?"

"Dead. They sprayed some kind of foam on him, but it didn't help much. The neighbor lady came back and explained the whole situation to me. It's murder—couldn't be more obvious." He pointed at the smoking house. "Look. Mrs. lives up there and Mr. back here above the garage. When they're together it's just one constant battle—I know what it's like, I'm divorced myself. These two didn't go that route, though—they just stayed married and went on hating each other. No harmony, you know what I mean?"

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"And then?" asked de Gier.

"Well," said the patrolman, "then the bomb. We saw it ourselves, didn't we? The windows just blew right out."

"But Ravelaar wasn't here at the time, was he?"

"Come on," said the patrolman. "Do me a favor. You two're from Homicide, aren't you?"

"So it was a time bomb, you think?"

"Now you're getting the idea. One sharp fellow, the husband. Must have checked the weather forecast. The flames are blowing toward the river and he lives back here out of harm's way. That apartment of his is completely furnished. He was looking out for his own."

De Gier pointed. "Is that the cat?"

"Yeah," said the patrolman. "That little ball of foam."

De Gier leaned against a tree.

The patrolman walked on. "Are you coming?" he asked them.

"A time bomb," said Grijpstra, following. "That doesn't sound like a lawyer. What was his motive?"

"Greed," said the patrolman. "What do you think a place like this is worth?" He turned to the adjutant. "Listen, it's obvious, simple as do-re-mi. Find out who made the bomb for this bastard or else find out how he put it together himself and you've got him!"

"Where've you been?" the fire chief demanded. "Hey, watch out!"

Grijpstra looked up.

"That was a piece of the lady," said the chief. "Fell down from the ceiling."

Grijpstra held his hand over his mouth.

"I know," said the chief. "Let's go back outside."

Outside, he held out his hand. "Know what this is?"

"A little piece of grey metal?"

"That's right," said the chief. "Also known as a shell fragment. Fancy that. My whole career I've been dying to run across a provable case of arson, and here I finally got one. What you're looking at is a remnant of a 'devilish engine'—in this case an exploded shell."

"A bomb?"

"A shell. I know what you're thinking—the patrolmen think so, too. But there's got to be a timing mechanism on a time bomb and I can't find a trace of one here. I've been over the house myself."

"You mean," said Grijpstra, "somebody shot off a cannon at the house?"

"Is that what I mean . . . ?"

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"The ambulance is coming," said de Gier. "Where did the chief go? We don't have to go back in there, do we?"

The chief returned and gave de Gier a bit of copper. De Gier winced and let it fall.

"You don't have asbestos hands like me, eh?" The chief picked up the piece of metal and held it. "I'm a walking fire extinguisher."

"Yes?" asked Grijpstra.

"But maybe not so simple as somebody thinks. I was right about that shell. The lady collected copper—the house is full of it. Most of it's all busted up now, but *this*, Adjutant—" he held up the bit of copper "—this is not from a milk can or a wine goblet or a dinner plate. It's part of a shell casing."

"So the whole shell exploded?"

"Yes," said the chief.

"How?"

"I don't know."

"Could it have been an accident?"

"Sure," said the patrolman. "The lady accidentally hit this shell with a hammer. No—wait a minute, I've got it. On the bottom of the shell case there's a detonating cap, and that's where the firing pin shoots off the cannon. You follow me? Well, what happened here is that the lady accidentally took a nail and pushed it into the detonating cap, and then coincidentally she smashed that nail right on the head with a hammer."

"Do you coincidentally happen to know what sort of a shell it might possibly have been?" said Grijpstra.

"*I* know that," said the chief.

"For sure?"

"I don't know anything for sure. But I was on the bomb squad in the Army during the war, so I picked up a few things. This was an Oerlikon shell."

"I know them, too," said de Gier. "I confiscated a pile of them once, from extremists or terrorists or whatever they were." He held his hands apart. "Yea long." He looked between his thumb and forefinger. "Yea thick."

"Pint size," said the patrolman. "And that little thing makes such a hell of a lot of noise."

"Yes, indeed," said the chief. "It's stuffed with high explosives. They burn like the devil when they go off."

"But why *did* it go off?" asked Grijpstra.

"Here comes the lord of the manor," said de Gier.

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"Let's grab him," said the patrolman. "That's him, the bastard, in his orange baby Citroen."

"That's right," said Grijpstra, "but I don't want you grabbing anybody. Will you receive him, Chief? My colleague and I will be in the park. When he's seen the remains of his wife and the cat, send him back to us."

"Mr. Ravelaar," said Grijpstra, "may I introduce Sergeant de Gier? And I am Adjutant Grijpstra."

"Ha!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I laughed," said Ravelaar. "Forgive me. Charmed, I'm sure. Pleasure to make your acquaintance." He roared with laughter. "There goes Max!"

"What's that?"

Tears rolled down Ravelaar's round cheeks. He smacked his bald head. He leaned against the gazebo, holding his belly. He hiccupped. "*There goes Max!*"

The detectives waited. Ravelaar regained control of himself. "Do forgive me, but it's so extraordinarily funny. May I offer you something? Will you follow me back to my humble abode?"

"Are you in shock?" asked de Gier.

"No, no. Come along, gentlemen, the drinks are cold." He looked at his watch. "Still a bit too early, perhaps? Ah, well, the exception proves the rule."

De Gier sat on a rickety Gothic stool, Grijpstra tottered on the remains of a Victorian armchair, Ravelaar rocked back and forth on a wobbly Empire sofa. "Hand-me-downs from the house, castoffs from Alicia's life style. This is my kennel, gentlemen, but the end is in sight. Drink?"

Grijpstra chose club soda, de Gier a glass of water. Ravelaar washed out three empty jam jars and poured a stiff measure of cheap gin in his own.

"To the end," he said, "and a new beginning."

"There goes Max?" asked de Gier.

Ravelaar raised his glass. "Yes, indeed."

"I don't think we understand you," said Grijpstra.

"Perhaps not. It's a citation from *Alice in Wonderland*. Too obscure for you, I imagine."

"Not if you explain it," said de Gier.

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"My wife's name was Alicia and verily—ha!—she lived in a wonderful world."

"Yes?"

"And how." Ravelaar stood up and pulled a book from a shelf. "I've got it here. Just a moment. Yes. Alice grows very tall and is trapped in a house, and all these strange creatures stuff a lizard down the chimney. Alice gives it a kick and, ha—" Ravelaar wiped his eyes with a handkerchief "—there goes Bill!"

"That's funny?" Grijpstra asked.

"Adjutant," Ravelaar giggled, "please, ow, my stomach. It's incredibly witty. One of the best scenes in the book. I've been laughing myself silly at it for all these years, and now it's actually happened. Hoo, hoo!"

"I don't think it's funny," said de Gier.

"No? Not even if this is better than the book? Not even when an extremely unpleasant fat cat goes up the chimney in Alicia's castle? There goes Max!"

"No," said Grijpstra.

"But listen, Adjutant. It all fits. Alicia kept getting bigger—so big that there wasn't any room for *me* in the house any more. That wasn't so funny. There goes Ravelaar. But in Max's case . . . ha! I can't stand it!"

"You're not crazy, are you?" asked de Gier.

Ravelaar sat up straight. "No." He drained his jam jar.

De Gier examined the books on the shelf nearest him. They were similarly bound and appeared to be a series on tax law. He pulled out a volume and showed it to Ravelaar. "Your specialty?"

"What? Oh, yes. I began with criminal law—also fascinating." He tittered.

"And you're not supposed to be crazy?" asked Grijpstra.

"No," said Ravelaar. "Well, yes, perhaps just a bit right now, but that'll pass. No, you can set that right out of your mind, Adjutant." He refilled his glass and lifted it. "You're only crazy if it can be proven that you're posing a threat to yourself or to others." He drank. "And there are so many other factors to be considered. Do I lead a disorganized life? On the contrary. Am I guilty of irresponsible behavior? No. Do I pay my taxes? You bet. Am I annoying anyone? Surely not. Am I talking nonsense?"

"Nonsense." Grijpstra nodded.

"There goes Max, you mean? Forgive me, Adjutant, but may I please be permitted to be just the least little bit happy? Didn't that

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hairy pest cause me incalculable trouble during his wretched life? *You* try pruning a rose bush with a yapping feline jumping all over you. The beast's arrogance was insufferable. Do you know where he left his messes? Right here in front of my door, that's where, and always right after the paths had been raked. Then right on back to the life of Reilly in the grand castle." The bottle gurgled. "The rotten lousy creature." Ravelaar drank. "But that's all over with now, too."

"Hey," said de Gier.

"All right, Sergeant," said Grijpstra. "Mr. Ravelaar, so that's the cat that went up the chimney. But your wife is in there sticking to the ceiling."

"Tsk," said Ravelaar.

"Because a shell exploded. Where do you think it came from?"

Ravelaar nodded. "Good question, Adjutant." He peered into his jam jar. "I've asked myself the same thing several times already. What do you say to this? Alicia was neurotic. She collected copper. Collecting as a hobby is perhaps educational, but it's not very healthy as a way of life. Alicia spent her entire life at flea markets." Ravelaar's hand waved at the horizon. "Gliding across the countryside in her Mercedes, she knew no bounds in her never-ending search for the perfect doorknob." He took a drink. "And I? I hobbled along in my little orange lemon."

"Neurotic," said Grijpstra.

"Indeed, Adjutant. Spiritual illness sometimes infests the subconscious mind, which then becomes evil and often self-destructive." Ravelaar pulled out his dirty handkerchief and wiped his eyes.

"You're sad?" asked de Gier.

"I've just lost my wife."

"You were jumping for joy a minute ago."

"A trifle confused, was I? Such things happen." Ravelaar stuffed the handkerchief back in his breast pocket. "Look, on one of her shopping sprees Alicia ran across some copper shells. One of them was live. You know what she liked best about copper?" He rubbed his fist back and forth across his open palm. "Polish, polish, polish. She bought copper polish by the barrel."

"I see," said Grijpstra.

"You do?"

"No. But I want to keep you talking. Tell me, Mr. Ravelaar, how old are you?"

Ravelaar stood up. "I have seen sixty-four springs pass by."

"You're an attorney?"

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Ravelaar bowed. "At your service. The office which is pensioning me off next week gives tax advice, primarily through me. I am a respected employee. The internal-revenue inspectors accept my suggestions. It hasn't always been so, but they've learned, they've learned. How carefully I prepare my cases, how coldly I strike. Isn't it a pity I'm going to have to stop making fools of them?"

"You've still got us," said Grijpstra.

Ravelaar sat down again. "Or whoever else dares to cross me."

"We'll be leaving now," said de Gier.

"But you'll be back," Ravelaar said. "I have a feeling this investigation of yours won't be over for a while yet. If it takes long enough, I'll be able to receive you up in the big house."

"One more question," said Grijpstra from the doorway.

"Ha," said Ravelaar, "I knew it. The tax inspectors use the same technique: just as you're leaving comes that one last question. What would you like to know, my dear Adjutant?"

"Do you take care of the park by yourself?"

Ravelaar opened a window and waved them over. "Do you see all this? A textbook example of the classical garden, conceived by a master and maintained by me."

"Why is it, then, that your stream is in such terrible condition?"

"That dingy swamp?"

"That's what it looks like now," said de Gier. "But you could keep birds there and have water lilies waving their blossoms in the breeze."

"I hate water."

The fire engines, the ambulance, and a police car drove off.

"But you live right by the river," Grijpstra said.

"Unfortunately. Things don't always work out the way a simple soul might wish. I've dreamed of drowning since I was a child. I stay away from water as best I can. The river? I ignore it. I know it's there behind the dike, but what's that to me? I brave the sight of it twice a day in my car, but only for a brief distance. I cut away from it as quickly as possible." He pointed toward the stream. "And that filthy pond. I'm having it filled in."

"Goodbye," said Grijpstra.

"It's you again," said Ravelaar, "disturbing my Sunday rest. Sit down and take a load off your flat feet." He held a bottle aloft invitingly.

"No, thanks," said Grijpstra.

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"An excellent cognac," said Ravelaar. "But why hoard it? Shall we drink our fill?"

"Not us," said de Gier, "we're on duty. We've been told that you're your wife's only heir."

"Who else, Sergeant? We have no children. That leaves me."

"Then," said Grijpstra, "we may conclude that you are now the owner of the distinguished manor house, the stately park, the other buildings on the property, the Mercedes, and the million guilders your wife had in the bank."

"Plus another three hundred thousand in life insurance and whatever they give me to repair the house. Motive present."

"Why was your wife's life insured?"

"Why not? The premiums were reasonable. Isn't is rather chauvinistic to insure only the man? It's just as awful when a wife predeceases her husband as the other way round. Can't male suffering be financially rewarded, too?"

"Your wife died," said Grijpstra, "and you have gained by her death. You're retiring next week. An excess of free time stretches out before you."

"Adjutant," said Ravelaar, "I like you. I'm not so enthusiastic about this henchman of yours, but you're my type of man—I can tell by your choice of words. It may well be difficult for you to follow my thought processes, but at least you're trying. I admire that."

"You've got nothing left to do but garden," Grijpstra went on. "I suppose you used to think it was all for your wife's sake. Your wife, with whom you no longer lived, but who could still enjoy the results of your labors from her castle. That must have bothered you."

Ravelaar sighed. "Indeed, Adjutant. And then that damned cat forever messing on my work."

"Your behavior is suspicious," said de Gier.

"Do you hear that?" bellowed Ravelaar, then immediately lowered his voice. "Do you heard that? Young troublemaker. Internal revenue's got them, too, these punks who call themselves inspectors. But sometimes they're wrong about things. You accuse me of murder, Sergeant. Your accusation is invalid. You may *not* suspect me. The facts and circumstances do not permit the slightest slur against my reputation.

"Alicia buys a copper shell. The shell explodes. What does that have to do with me? I visited the castle once a month to check over milady's bookkeeping. Can you prove that I saw the shell sitting there on her mantel? Does one shell stand out in the midst of a ton

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of copper kitsch? My wife was extremely neurotic. Suppose I *had* seen that shell? Then I ought to have warned her about it. Do you know whether or not I did? And finally, how did the stupid thing go off? Was there an automatic mechanism inside it? And where was I when the spit hit the fan?"

"Polish, polish, polish," said de Gier. He held an imaginary object between his legs and made rubbing motions with his free hand.

"Are you masturbating?" asked Ravelaar.

"The sergeant is polishing an Oerlikon shell," said Grijpstra. "The longer and faster he rubs, the hotter it gets. Friction."

Ravelaar filled his glass. "Are you sure you won't try some of this marvelous cognac? No? You don't know what you're missing." He sipped from his crystal glass.

"A survivor from the manor?" asked de Gier.

"Yes, the only one. The rest of the crystal—well, it was all insured."

"Polish, polish, polish," said de Gier.

"Alicia was a frustrated woman," said Ravelaar. "No sexual activity to speak of. Not much of a looker, you know? Rather homely, in fact." He gestured. "Short, chubby, thick spectacles, and not much nose. She looked a little like an owl."

"You married her for her money, then?"

"Me? But she kept it all for herself. Marriage contract, you know. And I paid half of our expenses. I made a little money, you see, though there was never much left over at the end of the month. Actually, now that you mention it—"

"Mention what?" asked de Gier.

"That polish, polish, polish. It must have been rather sexual, of course, all that rubbing. And she must have used a lot of elbow grease on that shell. Quite phallic in shape, wasn't it?"

De Gier jumped up. "*Bam!*"

"Do you have to shout?" cried Ravelaar.

"Pardon," said de Gier.

"Mr. Ravelaar," Grijpstra said, "you are a legitimate suspect. You knew that the shell was there, you knew that your wife polished the copper regularly, you knew that the shell would eventually explode. And you knew that, when it did—"

"—I'd wind up on Easy Street." Ravelaar bowed. "Which is where I am now. I own a castle surrounded by a lovely park where I can trim the roses and rake the paths to my heart's content, undisturbed

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by the outrages of that greasy, uncivilized cat. Nevermore to be hidden away in the leaky old slave quarters. Indeed, Adjutant."

"You were a lieutenant in the infantry," said de Gier. "You even saw some action—at Grebbenberg, wasn't it?"

"You have done your homework diligently," said Ravelaar. "Perhaps you even managed to steal a kiss from my young secretary. An A for the day, Brigadier. Just keep in mind that I *was* in the infantry and never saw an Oerlikon shell in my life. We used rifles, not cannons."

"I say we arrest him," said de Gier.

Grijpstra watched the river. "Look, Sergeant, there's that goose!"

"Pretty," said de Gier, "but I'm working right now."

"That goose is related to your work. It's a great-great-grandson of the birds Ravelaar chased off the estate immediately after moving in with Alicia, according to neighborhood gossip. He hated her already, poor woman. Whose only mistake was to marry beneath her station in the hope of some companionship."

"Exactly," said de Gier. "Two silly creatures making each other's lives a misery. She chases him out of the house and he vows to have his revenge. He's approaching retirement. He pays half the bills, and his income's about to be significantly reduced. It's now or never. He brings her the shell and waits. If he's lucky, perhaps he'll get the cat at the same time."

"Prove it," said Grijpstra. "Where did he buy the shell? You've seen everyone who deals in copper, interrogated everybody who knew Ravelaar. What have you learned?"

"It must have happened that way," said de Gier. "My instinct, my understanding of humanity— What do *you* think?"

"I think the same thing you do. But where's the proof? We live in a civilized society, we can't persecute a man because of mere suspicion. I'm not going to lose any sleep over it. You're an amateur now, you're taking it personally. 'There goes Max'—you just don't want to let that alone, do you?"

"What if we can get a confession out of him?"

"How?"

"Maybe bait him a little?"

"Wait," said Grijpstra.

"For what?"

Grijpstra pointed his forefinger at the roof of the Volkswagen. "For justice . . ."

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Icy gusts of wind blew wet snow against the windshield. "What's up?" asked de Gier.

"Amsteldijk, just this side of Ouderkerk. Car in the water. Well, the car's been pulled out of the water now, but there's no sign of the driver. Can you take a look?"

"On our way," said de Gier, and clipped the microphone back under the dashboard. He shook Grijpstra's shoulder. "Adjutant, are you with me?"

"What happened?" Grijpstra asked the traffic cop on the dike.

"A Mercedes skidded off the road coming around the curve there," said the officer. "Slick asphalt, that's what you get. The car broke through the ice and sank. The driver made it out, but wound up under the ice."

"Where?"

"Over there. See my partner? Why don't you give him a hand?"

Grijpstra crunched across the snow-covered ice.

"Be careful," called de Gier, following.

"It's thick enough to hold me," said Grijpstra.

"Hello," the patrolman greeted them. He was holding a broom. "Your turn to brush, my hands are freezing."

De Gier took the broom.

"There," said Grijpstra. "God Almighty."

Ravelaar lay on his back beneath the ice, arms spread, legs together. His eyes protruded and his mouth was open.

The patrolman ran off and came back with a sledgehammer. "I'll see if I can shift him over to where the car broke through the ice."

Grijpstra and de Gier walked alongside as the hammer blows jolted the body along.

"I told you we had only to wait," said Grijpstra.

The body bobbed up in the open water.

"There goes Ravelaar," said de Gier.

(translated by Josh Pachter)

"Q"

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EQMM AUTHOR PHOTO QUIZ

Part 2

This is the conclusion of the two-part photo quiz that began in the Mid-December 1984 issue, featuring (in all) 77 contributors to a magazine that has lasted 500 issues, with its creator Frederic Dannay living long enough to actively edit 473 of those issues, starting with Issue #1 in 1941! How he managed to do this and coauthor 35 novels and over 70 short stories with his cousin Manfred B. Lee, writing as Ellery Queen, might be the greatest mystery of all.

In an afterword to his story, "The Phoenician Bauble," in his new collection, *Banquets of the Black Widowers,* Isaac Asimov refers to Frederic Dannay as "the man who probably did more for the mystery field than any other single person since Conan Doyle." That he made the magazine so vital, in the interests of other authors and other readers (*oh* yes, he was a reader!), explains what he was like as a man as well as the unique success of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.*

The Editors

?

Answers and photo credits on pages 63 and 64

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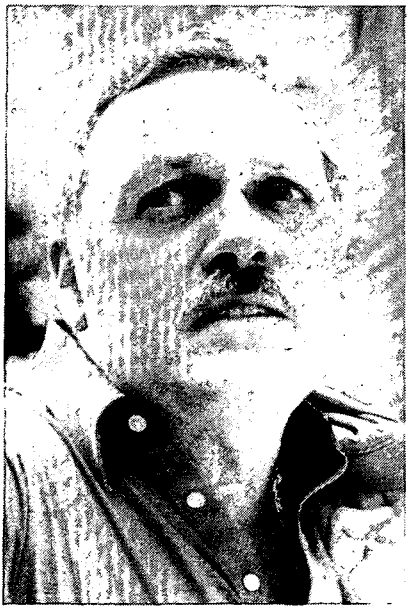

1. He won the Edgar for best mystery short story ("Horn Man") in 1980 and MWA scrolls for two stories since then. His books on fact crime and prisons are a significant contribution to the genre.

2. Edgar-winner for two short stories, "The Fallen Curtain" (1974) and "The New Girl Friend" (1983). Her novels, some about Chief Inspector Wexford, have earned her a wide audience.

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3. Author of over 100 mystery short stories, he's from Missouri.

4. He specializes in puzzle stories and *EQMM* published a series of his mini-mysteries in the 1970s.

5. She was a retired schoolteacher when *EQMM* published her excellent first story, "Mr. Sweeney's Day."

6. Author of series about spunky widow Em Grady and New Zealand drifter Keith Jenkins.

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7. Once a social worker, she writes cogently about both the advantaged and the disadvantaged.

8. He also writes as Tucker Coe and Richard Stark.

9. He is very funny on the subjects of ad men and cartoonists, Hollywood and suburban Connecticut.

10. A.k.a. Paul Kavanagh and Chip Harrison, he also teaches mystery writing.

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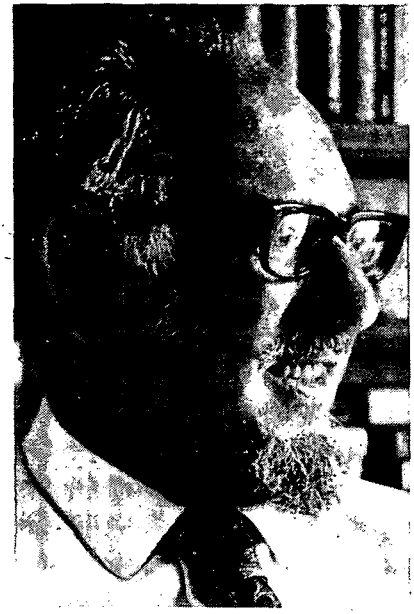

11. An MWA Grand Master and a man of letters, Ellery Queen presented a special volume of his stories, *How To Trap a Crook*, in 1977.

12. A story by her in this issue, like many of her stories, poses a problem between children and adults:

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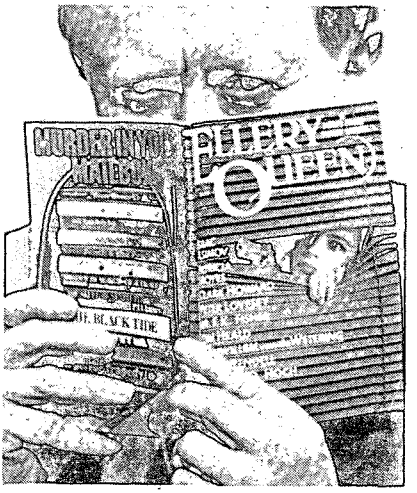
13. Of the four specialties of the house on this page, he reviews books . . .

14. She considers stories for publication in the magazine and the EQ anthologies . . .



15. He reviews what's happening in the mystery field . . .

16. He reviews crime on the silver or home screen . . .

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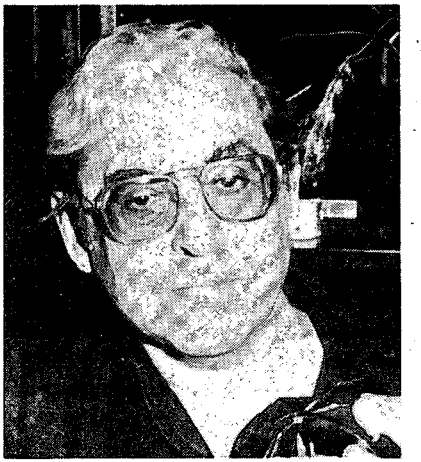

17. A prolific mystery writer, he has also won an Emmy for writing TV's *Edge of Night*.

18. Creator of Los Angeles P.I. Athalia Goode. If his face is familiar, you've probably seen him on TV sitcoms.

19. His first published story, in *EQMM*, was "The Dripping"; his first novel, *First Blood*, is now a feature film.

20. His novels *Death Wish* and *Hopscotch* are also feature films and much of his writing is presently for the screen.

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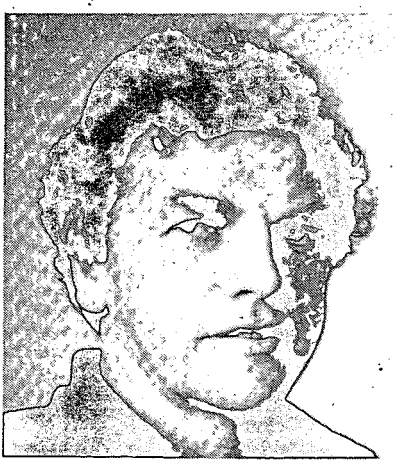
21. Author of *Where Are the Children?* and *A Stranger Is Watching*, her new novel is *Stillwatch*.

22. Think Fletch and Flynn.



23. Think Sergeant Cribb.

24. She played herself in *Our Gang* and Carrie in the original Broadway cast of *Carousel*.

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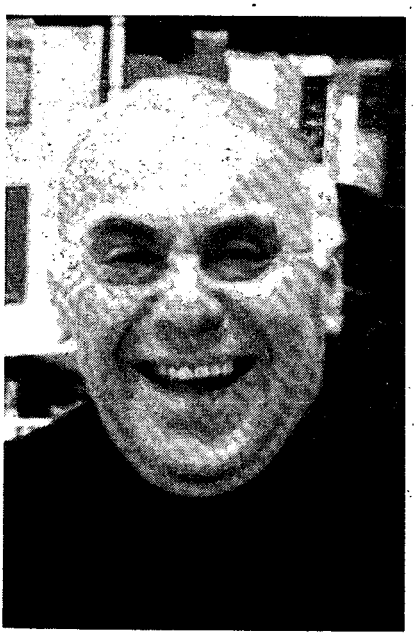
25. Think Maynard Bullock and Ganelons I, II, III, and IV.



26. Think Pharoah Love and Dorothy Parker.

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27. Think Lang and Lovell.

28. Think Mr. Strang.

29. Think Grave Tones and Hal Johnson and the Photographer.

30. Think Dr. Basil Willing.

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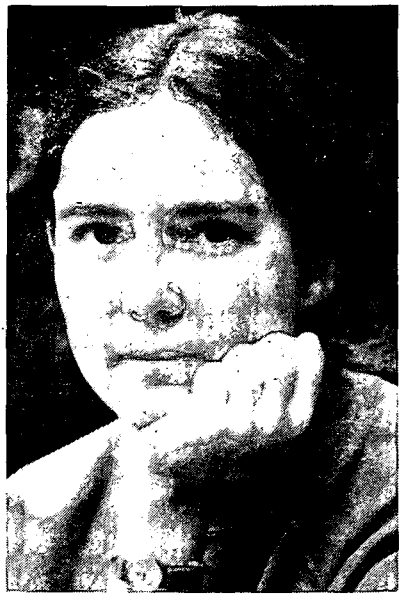
31. His detectives are as diverse as Mrs. Craggs and Inspector Ghote of the Bombay CID.

32. Creator of Mahboob Ahmed Chaudri, this writer's first story was published in *EQMM* when he was fifteen.
33. Winner of the first Robert L. Fish Memorial Award for best first mystery short story of the year ("Locked Doors," *EQMM*, 10/83).



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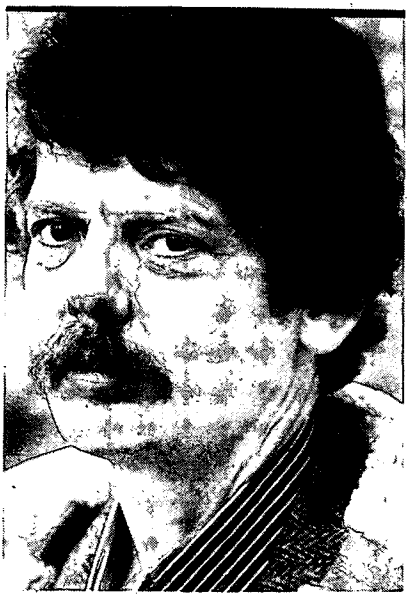

34. Creator of Amsterdam's Grijpstra and de Gier.

35. Creator of Inspector Wilfred Dover.

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36. Husband and wife, his fictional detective is Virgil Tibbs, hers is Sam Ohara.

37. Two other celebrated police-procedural authors, his cop is Mitch Taylor . . .
38. his are Fred Fellows and Frank Sessions.

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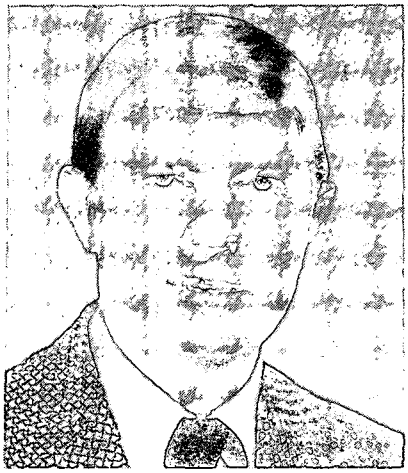
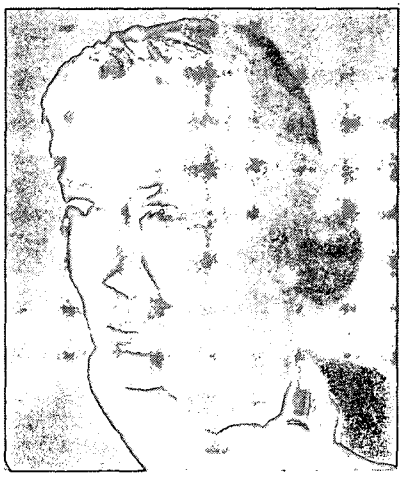


39. A steady contributor to mystery magazines for some years, his "Screams and Echoes" won an MWA scroll in 1974.



40. A major novelist and short-story writer, both her mother and her sister have also contributed significantly to the genre.

41. Her detective, whose latest adventure is recounted in *Hell Bent for Heaven,* is a female sports photographer.

42. Sometimes her pseudo-surname is preceded by Elizabeth, sometimes by E. X., but her real name is Morna Doris Brown.

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43. He started it all.

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ANSWERS TO EQMM AUTHOR PHOTO QUIZ Part 2

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2. Ruth Rendell. Photograph © Ken M. Sekiguchi.
3. John Lutz. Photograph by Bill Selley.
4. Edward Wellen. Photograph by Barbara Wellen Schreiber.
5. Clements Jordan.
6. Patricia Bosworth.
7. Nedra Tyre.
8. Donald E. Westlake. Photograph by Joyce Ravid.
9. Ron Goulart.
10. Lawrence Block. Photograph by Patrick Trese.
11. Julian Symons. Photograph by Mark Gerson.
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13. Allen J. Hubin.
14. Karen A. Prince. Photograph by Eleanor Sullivan.
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19. David Morrell. Photograph by Kent Studio.
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21. Mary Higgins Clark. Photograph by Sigrid Estrada.
22. Gregory Mcdonald. Photograph by Adriano Alecchi-Milano.
23. Peter Lovesey. Photograph © Ken M. Sekiguchi.
24. Jean Darling.
25. James Powell. Photograph by Glenna Gallo.
26. George Baxt. Photograph by Jacqueline Babbin.
27. Robert Edward Eckels. Photograph by Jim Eckels.

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28. William Brittain. Photograph © Ken M. Sekiguchi.
29. James Holding.
30. Helen McCloy.
31. H. R. F. Keating. Photograph © Ken M. Sekiguchi.
32. Josh Pachter. Photograph by L. Boeken.
33. Heidi Vanderbilt. (Her pseudonym is Lilly Carlson.)
34. Janwillem van de Wetering. Photograph by Willem Diepraam.
35. Joyce Porter. Photograph © Ken M. Sekiguchi.
36. John Ball and Nan Hamilton. Photograph by Hollander Photographic.
37. Lawrence Treat.
38. Hillary Waugh. Photograph by Robert Tobey.
39. Donald Olson.
40. Ursula Curtiss. (Her mother was Helen Reilly, her sister is Mary McMullen.)
41. Shannon OCork. Photograph by Milton Ackoff.
42. Elizabeth (E. X.) Ferrars. Photograph by Antonia Reeve.
43. Frederic Dannay.

Photo layout by Theresa Parisi.

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Your editor is often asked to conduct mystery-writing workshops, and this past year had a wonderful time addressing serious writers in West Virginia, Texas, and North Carolina. And as in previous years and previous workshops, the question came up: "How do we go about finding ideas for stories?"

The answer, it seems to me, is contained in the following three *first stories, all written by the same author and submitted to EQMM in the order printed here, between December 30, 1983, and June 7, 1984—from the author's imagination and experience and energy.*

Asked for biographical information about herself, Suzanne Jones said: "I was an oil-field brat in Arabia and Indonesia, took a doctorate in English, and have worked as an insurance executive for the past nine years. In October [1983], I quit insurance to work as a writer. I've just completed my first mystery novel and am at work on my second. I am delighted EQMM is my first publisher."

The delight is mutual. Suzanne Jones, we're sure you'll agree, is "a find" . . .

VIPER

by SUZANNE JONES

We could hear the flat sounds the guns made even before we topped the hill and saw the men in the jeep in the field.

My grandfather stopped the truck. "What'n the hell d'you s'pose they're up to," he said to the steering wheel instead of to me. "What do you s'pose they're after?"

The jeep moved very slowly over the ground. One of the men was leaning out of it with pistol drawn, searching the ground. A man stood not far from us, leaning on a fencepost, watching the jeep.

© 1984 by Suzanne Jones.

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My grandfather got out of the truck heavily.

"I want to come, too," I said.

"I thought you were sick," he said. "Had to go all the way to town to get you. And now?"

He started walking toward the man at the fence, so I got out of the truck, too.

The man greeted my grandfather.

"What's going on?" my grandfather asked.

"Huntin' snakes." The man removed the wet black cigar-butt from his mouth. "Prairie rattlers."

"Rattlesnakes, huh? Well, I never."

The man looked at me. "Hey, Missy, what's a big girl like you doing out of school?"

"She's sick," my grandfather said disgustedly. "Had to go and pick her up at school and was just taking her home."

"Well, she don't look none too good at that," the man said, looking at me. My grandfather never looked at me.

I ignored them.

"You're new around here, ain't you?" the man asked my grandfather.

"Yeah, me and my wife bought the old Sloan place. The kid lives with us."

"I'm Henry Anderson," the man said, stretching out his hard brown hand.

"Fred Gwen," my grandfather said. "Kill many of them?"

"Lord, yes. Why, this field is the biggest prairie-rattler den in the whole county, maybe even in the whole state of Texas. There's a prairie-dog town down there in that low place. The snakes go down into the holes this time of year to below the frost line for the winter. We figure they come from all over a nine-square-mile area to this one place."

"How many you killed?"

"Just a second." The man cupped his hands to his mouth. "Lucas! *Lucas!* Come on over here!" He turned back to my grandfather.

"What do you do with them?" my grandfather asked.

"The boys skin 'em, clean 'em. They use the skins for hatbands. From the really big ones, they can make belts. They eat 'em, too. They say the meat's a real delicacy, but you'll have to take their word for it 'cause there ain't a man living that could get me to try it." I watched the jeep turn slowly and bounce toward us. "What d'you do, Fred—in town, I mean."

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"I haven't found anything just yet. I'm a jeweler. Best goddamn watch-repair man in this part of the state."

My grandfather rubbed his soft white hands together and then stuck them in his hip pockets like the other man.

The jeep came right up to the fence and stopped. My grandfather and the man climbed through the fence, and I followed them. My grandfather looked over the side of the jeep. "Jesus Christ," he said.

I tried jumping up and down, but I still couldn't see. "What is it?" I cried. "I want to see."

Mr. Anderson picked me up and set me on the side of the jeep. I jerked my feet back.

The bottom of the jeep was moving. It was full of snakes.

One of the younger men laughed. "They ain't going to hurt you," he said.

"They're alive," I said.

"No, they ain't. See, snakes don't quit moving 'til after sundown," the other young man said. "But they can't hurt you." He reached down and picked up a twisting body, which continued to jerk and roll about his wrist. "See, they ain't got any head."

Each body ended in a dark red stub.

"How many you got there?" my grandfather asked.

"About twenty, I'd guess," Mr. Anderson said.

"Twenty-three," the young man driving the jeep said.

"Want to shoot some?" the other asked my grandfather.

"Yeah, Fred, go ahead," Mr. Anderson said. He looked at me. "You want to go, too?"

"No," I said.

My grandfather got into the jeep. "I can't leave you here to make a nuisance of yourself. You come with me."

I was wishing I had on boots like the rest of them instead of a dress and school shoes.

"Don't fall out, now," Mr. Anderson warned me. "The vipers are hard to see even when they're a foot thick on the ground."

The jeep began to move and one of the young men gave my grandfather one of the pistols. "You using .22's?" my grandfather asked.

"With shot shells," the driver said. He laughed. "We ain't that good'a shots."

I could see the mounds of hard baked dirt which marked the prairie-dog holes. The ground was sparsely covered with white grass, which disappeared within ten feet of the holes, and was studded here and there with small low bushes less than a foot high.

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The sun was warm on my back, and I was thinking that this was better than being in school as long as I kept my eyes off the floor of the jeep. The jeep stopped.

"Under that bush by the big hole," the driver whispered. "God, it's a big one. You try it, Mister. Aim for the head so's you don't spoil the skin."

I leaned forward. I couldn't see anything under any of the bushes, much less the one everyone else was looking at.

My grandfather steadied his wrist with his other hand. He fired, and then I saw the snake move away from the bush toward the hole. It carried its tiny head high, body forming half coils, driving it toward the safety of the hole. One of the men fired, and the motion of the snake was interrupted. It arched and fell back thrashing on the ground. The two men jumped out of the jeep, each carrying a long pole. One man used the pole with the hook on the end to pin down the body while the other used the one with the knife on the end to saw the head off. As the man pulled the head off the body, there followed a long bright-red string. He kept pulling and the string stretched and then tore apart.

"There's one you won't have to gut!" one of the young men laughed. The other raked the mangled head down the hole.

"We do that to keep somebody or the stock from stepping on it. It can kill you just as easy dead as alive, if you ain't careful."

I was starting to feel sick again. The man who had been driving flung the body of the snake in with the others at my feet.

My grandfather wiped his mouth. He was grinning and shaking his head from side to side.

I tried not to look at the large brown-and-gray, white-bellied body of the snake on the floor of the jeep, scattering bright red drops about it.

They drove us back to the truck while I kept my eyes shut. I felt a gentle tapping on my ankle. I looked down.

One of the snakes was striking with its headless body at my foot. I screamed and kicked at it. I kept screaming until my grandfather had started the truck and sent it roaring along the dirt road away from that field. Then I drew my legs up under me and stripped off the bloody sock, being careful not to get the blood on my hands.

"You're more trouble than you're worth," my grandfather said crossly, staring over the steering wheel.

I didn't say anything, just kept looking carefully around the cab of the truck in case one had crawled inside. I had a feeling that

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maybe one was lying along the back of the seat, back of my head. I tried not to turn my head, just to move my eyes, but I couldn't see anything behind my grandfather's pale wrinkled neck, so I couldn't know for sure. I sat very still all the way home until I could bolt from the truck.

"She acted just like a baby," my grandfather said. "Screaming and carrying on. The damn thing was dead. Anybody could see that."

Grandmother wiped her hands on her apron. "I begged Clara not to go and raise the child in that heathen place. It's no place for a baby, I said. But no, she wouldn't listen, and now our daughter's dead, and we've got to try with God's help to undo all that harm." She shook her head and told me to change my clothes and go feed my rabbit.

I was feeling better by the time I got to the rabbit hutch, which was farther out in the backyard than anything else, past the chicken house, just at the bottom of the hill on the edge of the big pasture. It was close to getting dark, the days getting shorter this time of year. My rabbit was small—Daddy had given him to me just before he went back to Sumatra, and that had been less than a month ago. They told me the rabbit would be happier out here than in the house with me since I would be away at school all day, but I didn't think he was any happier. I pictured my grandfather's face and one of the bodies on the floor in that jeep. "Viper," I whispered.

Grandmother had been burning leaves, and the smell of that still lingered, layering the cooling air. Soon it would be cold weather.

I didn't see my rabbit when I got to the hutch. Maybe that's the reason I didn't open the door right away. I stood closer, looking through the screen into the dark corners.

The snake had come in through a tear in the screen, but now was too swollen to get out that way. It moved its body sluggishly. When I had first seen it, I jumped back. Now I came closer. It looked just like the snake on the floor of the jeep except that it had a swell in its body partway down and it had a head. For a moment I just stood still, understanding what had happened to my rabbit and that it was gone, just like my grandfather wanted since it, too, had been more trouble than it was worth. I watched the snake bring its head around and look at me with its fixed little eyes. It moved its tail and I could hear the dry sound of its rattles. It moved to the hole, but seemed to know that it was still too large to pass through.

I got a board and some rocks and put the board over the hole in

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the screen, shoring it up so that I was sure the snake couldn't push it away. I put the lettuce in the trash barrel and went to supper.

"How's Peter?" Grandmother asked as she put the plates on the table.

"Fine," I said.

"Rabbit's a damned nuisance," my grandfather said, and I could tell he had been drinking. "Make a good stew one of these days."

"Fred, don't tease the child."

We ate supper, and I went to bed early, listening to my grandfather sing badly in the next room and Grandmother wonder out loud when Daddy's check would come.

I thought how nice it would be when I could go and live with Daddy again. Maybe Grandmother could come with me.

I turned my face to the wall.

"Viper," the wall whispered to me, and I closed my eyes and could see the tiny swaying head of the snake before I fell asleep.

In the morning I got up while it was still dark outside, even before Grandmother got up. I got the bottle of gin my grandfather had hid in the flour bin so that Grandmother couldn't lock it up with the others. I got dressed and put the bottle under my coat and went out to the rabbit hutch. The snake never seemed to sleep, either, and it was waiting for me, its head up.

I hunted around until I found a long stick and worked it through a small hole in the wire. I prodded the snake, and it coiled back, opening its mouth wide. In the dim morning light, its whole mouth looked white. I pushed at the snake with the stick until I had it in the corner farthest from the door. Then I opened the door a little and threw the bottle inside.

I latched the door and withdrew the stick. The snake followed my movements alertly. It had closed its mouth and was running its tongue in and out. The swell in its body was smaller than before.

I made sure the board was securely against the side of the hutch and then I went back into the house and lay in my bed until Grandmother called me.

My grandfather said that Saturday was a bad day to go into town and look for work, so he sat in the sun on the porch and read yesterday's papers and listened to the ballgame, and Grandmother killed a chicken for supper by pulling its head off and letting it string blood everywhere. Chickens didn't die right away, either, just like snakes.

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Toward evening he ran out of the bottle he kept hid in his boot in the clothes closet, and from then on I knew it was just a matter of time before he looked in the bottom of the flour bin.

Grandmother was in the bedroom sewing, so that he didn't raise his voice too loud when he grabbed my arm, leaving dusty white marks.

"You seen my bottle?" His face was red and wrinkled up. "Did she get it? Do you know where it is?" He shook me a little.

I nodded. Yes, I knew where it was.

It was getting dark outside, with blue clouds to the north. We walked out back toward the rabbit hutch. Behind us, I could hear Grandmother coming to the door and saying something about supper. We went on, though, him and me, me in the lead and him stumbling along behind me.

I stopped a little ways from the hutch. "In there," I said.

He didn't look at me even then but blinked suspiciously at the dark. He reached his hand out slowly and put it on the latch.

I stood very still, then backed a step away. It was the sound that warned him, the whirr when he opened the door, so that he managed to snatch his hand back before the snake struck through the opening. But he was too drunk to keep his balance, and he fell heavily against the side of the hutch, and the snake struck again. It became tangled in his shirt, and he couldn't seem to get it off, and he was screaming.

Then Grandmother was there with the hoe, raking and chopping at the snake, until finally she pushed its mangled, twitching body aside. Its head was nothing more than a dark bloody lump ground into the dirt.

Before he died, they let Grandmother and me into the room. He had a weak heart, they said. A younger man would have survived. His heart couldn't stand the strain of the venom, they said.

My grandfather looked at me, one pale-blue eye wide with fear and disbelief. By then, of course, he couldn't speak, but he looked at me with a pale, disbelieving eye, his feverish head set high on several pillows.

It was a look I've remembered all through the years. He finally really looked at me.

"Q"

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THE GREEN CLOCK

by SUZANNE JONES

I heard that Clarise Ranier was dead from Harry Gill, who mentioned it in his Christmas letter. We who were part of the Sumatra bunch have always kept up with one another, though it has been easily thirty years, even before Sukarno fell, that we all chanced to come together in Sumatra under the auspices of the Standard Vacuum Oil Company, then of New Jersey.

I had known Clarise but slightly until that last local leave in Bali she took with her husband Jack, where I got to know her as well as one man might know another's wife without seriously inconveniencing him. I remember those days in Bali with a clarity that is remarkable since sometimes I let the kettle whistle itself dry and call my wife by my first wife's name and confuse the names of my grandchildren.

But I have the clock to remind me of Clarise—the clock she gave me that last day in Bali so many years ago. It sits before me even now on the mantel as it has on so many other mantels, a constant reminder when I notice it—mostly I don't—of the fragile and deceptive nature of relationships. Yes, and I have thought of telling my present wife of that day, since it was so long ago—of how Clarise Ranier might have put her hand softly against the shoulder of her husband as he leaned out to photograph the headwaters of the ——— River where it drops a hundred feet or more into the ——— Gorge and sent him fluttering like a moth down through spray and space to the dark wet rocks below.

And though for years I've thought of Clarise Ranier off and on, I never saw her again after Bali and only heard of her through this person and that. She lived here, was seen there, might have married again, possibly divorced—the usual sort of featureless rumors concerning someone one knew slightly many years ago. But my present wife never met Clarise, which is perhaps why I've never told her about the tragedy or the clock.

That's not the reason, of course.

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I don't think I should have told either of my wives of that day in Bali, for reasons that are, and shall remain, my own.

My first wife, Ariadne, despite her name, had an unromantic and uncompromising view of the world, and had she accompanied me on that local leave things might have turned out quite differently, but Ariadne already was suffering from the various female maladies that would eventually claim her life and had taken medical leave some months earlier to the States, where I was to join her when my tour was up.

So on one of those perfect days in Bali which are too numerous to be remarkable, since Jack Ranier had succumbed to an attack of the local crud and refused to leave the comfortable bathroom of the hotel for chancy accommodations in the countryside, I spent the day with Clarise, considering the ruins of some unexceptionable temples and nearly everywhere surrounded by the preparations for the pyres of the dead.

At breakfast I found Clarise in a pensive, distracted mood. Clarise was one of those southern women who seemed to fade rather than to age. She was something this side of forty, a little older than myself, I would guess, with a diffident manner—one of those women who is willingly and one suspects joyfully committed to a lifetime of subjugation to a dominant male. So it rather startled me to discover that she had a pleasant sense of humor about herself and seemed inclined to relate to me, practically a stranger, the most intimate details of her existence.

She was wearing a soft white dress and a large-brimmed straw hat (with a peach ribbon on it) to keep off the sun. I knew she wasn't a golfer like so many of the other wives, but she said she read and played a little bridge to while away the long humid days—preserving her complexion, I arrogantly assumed, and thinking the pale, languid thoughts peculiar to such women.

"I'm sorry about yesterday," she said, and I felt myself growing angry with her even though I sensed her apologies usually had that effect on men.

"I should explain, I think, even though I don't quite understand it myself."

I tried to cut her explanation short—I had found yesterday's experience itself painful enough—but she went on softly and relentlessly. Again I felt used. I now had to sit there and listen. But the morning air was cool and the breakfast guests had mostly departed the huge hotel dining room, which ran along a veranda, and beneath

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the rolled-up bamboo curtains I could see the bright green of the jungle. It was pleasant sitting there drinking the tea, thick with cream, and enjoying the coolness which would be lost soon enough.

"I awoke yesterday morning," she said, "and lay in bed looking up at the swathes of mosquito netting and thinking of my son Richard. I realized that I hadn't thought of him in years. I had deliberately kept him from my mind after Korea, but now, instead of closing my eyes and feeling that increasing pressure in my throat, I was able to think about him quietly and pleasantly.

"As I stared up at the mosquito netting that draped the bed, I was remembering the smoothness of his features—the firm mouth, straight nose, and green eyes. He never looked old enough to shave. I felt pleasure in just remembering how he looked, and then I wondered why this particular morning it should be so . . .

"I had an odd feeling on the plane coming over. I remember looking down at the South China Sea when suddenly I wondered what it would be like if the plane should slowly roll over on its back and make the long dive toward the sea below.

"Lying on my back on the damp sheets yesterday, I remembered quite clearly that desire to know how it would feel to drop down to the sea like that, but I'm certain I hadn't thought of Richard on the plane. Besides, his plane had gone down over land, had crashed into a hillside and exploded.

"I looked over at Jack, who I could see dimly through the layers of mosquito netting in the next bed. He had just sat up and was pawing the netting away so he could swing his legs over the side and sit while he had the first cigarette of the morning.

"I closed my eyes so he wouldn't speak to me, but I could no longer call that picture of Richard to mind. Parts of it blurred as I thought on it, and rather than lose it all I sighed and sat up, pushing at my hair. I heard my husband work the lighter several times before it caught and then suck in and loudly expel his first lungful of smoke.

"I pushed the net aside, shook out my slippers, and put them on.

" 'Morning,' Jack said, just as he always did. He sat in his shorts, stomach bulging over his thighs, his elbows resting on his knees with his hands relaxed at the ends of his short, thick wrists, holding the cigarette carelessly.

"And I answered him just as I always do.

"I remember thinking as I went into the bathroom that my husband's posture would be repulsive in a man with a hairless body.

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The skin would shine in the heat since it was already late in the morning.

"But the thick hair which covers my husband's body is, well, less distasteful to me since our having lived in Sumatra for a year—though, I then remembered, Richard's body had been lean and smooth. I knew my husband hadn't watched me leave the room, and I pictured him sitting on the edge of the bed, staring at the floor. I knew he was content for the moment, sitting on the bed and, from time to time, pulling on the cigarette.

"I splashed some water on my face from the rusty faucet on the orange-stained basin. I looked into the mirror, not wiping the water away because it felt almost cool from the overhead fan that beat the air steadily with its oily wooden arms.

"I let my eyes move over my reflection as if it were a photograph. My face looked much the same way it has for as long as I can remember. I just get a little fainter year by year. The lines are less definite. Tomorrow they'll be fainter yet. I remember thinking that one day I'll be able to look right through myself, and the next day I'll be gone entirely.

"The water beaded and ran down my neck, spotting the silk at my throat. I observed that indifferently. Silk is so cheap here.

" 'How long are you going to be in there, for Christ's sake?' Jack called from the other room.

"I shook my head to clear it. 'I'm coming,' I told him.

"We dressed and ate quickly in the hotel dining room because Jack really doesn't know how to do anything slowly, even when we're on vacation. Then we went out into the streets to look at the preparations for the funeral pyres. I still think it very odd that these people celebrate death almost as a feast day. They were everywhere, constructing elaborate, fantastic animals to contain the bones of their relatives dead a year or more, which Jack said they would then parade and burn on a common pyre.

"The streets were crowded and dirty, and it was beginning to get very hot. Bali looks so green, so smooth and cool from the air, but it's just like living in Sumatra, really—hot and wet. I don't like Bali much. I see the same covert hostility in the eyes of the Balinese as in the eyes of our own servants, but the Balinese jostle and laugh a lot and seem to work very hard at looking happy. It is just the same as Sumatra—except for the women, of course. The women naked to the waist don't bother me as much as I thought it might.

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Their breasts are pendulous and wrinkled. The only real reason I can see for covering them up is to hide their ugliness.

"My husband's fresh white suit was looking grey already. The camera strap was wrinkling the collar of his shirt and he was wiping the perspiration off his forehead angrily, glaring about him in the sun.

"Sometimes I find him disgusting. The jerky, impatient movements of his arms. The sweat continuously forming large beads on his high red forehead. I suppose people who have been married as long as we have feel that way about each other sometimes.

"I found myself thinking of Richard cutting firewood at the lake in New Jersey that last summer, bare to the waist, swinging the axe in the early evening.

"I closed my eyes, trying to keep that moment of the sounds of my own breathing and Richard's axe and, somewhere out on the lake, far-off birds.

" 'I'll be damned,' my husband said.

"I opened my eyes at that. In the shade of a shed was a large bull with a skin of purple tissue-paper, long yellow horns, and a huge spearlike penis wrapped in gold foil. Three half naked children were crouched beneath the bull, giggling and touching the long golden shaft that jutted beneath its stomach.

" 'I'll be goddamned,' Jack said, tearing open the camera case.

"The stench from the shed was strong and hot. The children ran their hands along the shaft, giving me sly, contemptuous looks.

"I kept blinking my eyes, trying to keep the images separate, apart, but the scene before me kept intruding on the picture of Richard. I turned away, nauseated.

" 'I don't feel well,' I said to Jack. 'I've got to get out of the sun for a while. I'll meet you back at the hotel.'

" 'Don't be late for lunch,' he said. 'Carver is by himself and I've asked him to join us. He and I are teeing off at one.'

"I know I was swaying slightly, faint, trying to keep my mind on what he was saying, about the golf game with you, about it being the only chance he would have to play the course in Bali. Then when I thought he must have stopped, I said, 'Yes, I won't forget,' and at last was able to turn away.

"And I really did feel strange—but rather than ill, it was more like the sudden drop an elevator takes, or that time in Houston when I sliced my thumb to the bone and I was very much aware that something was wrong, that I should be feeling something, but

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had felt nothing at all for a few moments, watching blood come very slowly.

"I fumbled in my bag for a handkerchief and pressed it to my face and neck. The noise and the dust from the street were overwhelming. I had to get out of the sun. I stepped into the nearest shop.

"I stood inside for a moment, letting my eyes adjust to the dimmer light. It was a shed more than a shop, open to the street, with light leaking through holes in the roof, falling on scarred glass cases of krises and fans of ivory and sandalwood and painted paper and some small pink and green jade statuettes. I breathed in the musty, sweet scent of the sandalwood and tried very hard to think about the things in the cases and on the walls, and to slow my breathing and my heart.

"I decided firmly to put those filthy children out of my mind, that I mustn't think of that just now. I tried instead to focus my eyes and thoughts on the irregular rows of pure tin boxes that looked silver in the dim light, and on the large kris on the wall behind the proprietor, with its long ornate scabbard, carved like the long thin body of a bird, wings flaring at the hilt, and the beaked ivory handle above.

"A small Chinese in a business suit came forward. 'Something for Madam?' He bowed politely.

" 'I'll just look for a while,' I said far too loudly. He bowed again and retired to another part of the shop, pretending to count fans from a soiled cardboard box in front of him.

"I moved distractedly about, stopping finally in front of a case of clocks. I could hear them ticking all at once, the way I could almost hear the breathing of the little man in the corner. My heart had slowed until I was beginning to feel more normal, but still there was that cold, insistent pressure inside my chest.

"There were gilt clocks, alarm clocks, pendant clocks, and, behind a squat French provincial clock, a green clock—green the way the sea is just before it breaks into deep water.

"I moved away from the case quickly, but the man had seen my face.

" 'One of the clocks, Madam? The green one,' he said smoothly, opening the case and placing the clock on the counter.

"I picked it up. It was less then eight inches high, of cut glass, heavy, with clean, square corners. Brass pillars supported a roof of more of the heavy green glass, ornamented with a tiny brass lamp. The light breaking through the holes in the roof of the shop slanted

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across the counter, casting green shadows about the clock—my fingers behind the thick glass seemed beneath sea-green water.

" 'It's a Japanese clock, Madam,' he explained. 'From the Occupation. Very fine, very old.'

"Small letters on the Roman-numeraled face of the clock said 'Manufactured by Seikosha, Tokyo, Japan.' One of its brass claw legs was loose and the brass itself was turning green.

"I moved on about the shop several times, but I always came back to the clock. Then I looked at my watch and saw it was past noon. I knew I was going to be very late. My husband would be angry with me. But I liked the clock. I liked the way the light came through it.

"As I bargained with the Chinese, I had the oddest thought: I realized that I would become very annoyed with him if the bargaining went too quickly. It was almost as if I wanted to be late. But that, of course, I thought as the man finally put the clock in a brown-paper sack for me, was ridiculous. My husband can be very unkind to me when he's angry—it's almost as if he likes to humiliate me. And I wanted very much to be with him right at that moment. That strange, panicky feeling was beginning to make me feel weak again. I thanked the man and hurried back to the hotel.

"The rest you know," she said. "I'm sorry."

And there had been a scene. Ranier and I were perilously close to missing tee-time, and I had wondered, though not aloud since Ranier was senior to me in the company, why in the world we didn't just go and leave his wife to her own lunch. But the scene that followed seemed as necessary to him as to her, though I felt it unkind and unnecessary to drag me in as a third to witness the proceedings. Jack seemed particularly incensed at being inconvenienced over such an unworthy acquisition. The clock, it turned out, didn't even run.

Despite, or perhaps because of, that terrible scene, Clarise almost left the clock behind as we left the dining room, and I reminded her, not without irony, about it.

I was completely irritated with them both, and now even more so after having to listen to Clarise's inconclusive and ambiguous confidences at breakfast. She had criticized her husband in no way for the brutality of his behavior, and since she had provoked the occasion if not the intensity of her husband's response, I shouldn't wonder.

"He's been good to me," she said at one point in the afternoon. "He indulges me more than anyone can know."

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But as she and I endured together the little discomforts travel and tourism visited upon us that day, I couldn't help but be drawn to her, to her grace and her softness and her self-effacing sense of humor. At some moment, I found myself actually envying Jack. My wife was not at all like that.

Jack had recovered sufficiently to join us for dinner. Whereas I had always known Jack to be a man who never cheated at golf and always stood his round of drinks at the club, still there had always been something that put me off him. There seemed to be something mean and ungenerous in his nature. Clarise's confusing account of the events preceding the scene over the clock had done nothing to alter this impression, but I noticed for the first time that evening something in his pale features akin to, well, disappointment, and I found myself almost sympathetic to him.

Jack's illness, however, had only subdued, not improved, upon his mood of the day before. He was distant and brusque with Clarise, who excused herself after dessert and left us to our after-dinner drinks and cigars.

During dinner, Clarise had spoken of Richard again and told, while Jack stared in silence, of his taking her, his mother, to the cadet's last ball. I was glad she could speak of Richard easily now, as though that might restore something to herself or her marriage. I couldn't judge the effect on Jack, so still had he become, but no sooner had she disappeared than he began to tell a reminiscence of his own, a scurrilous postscript to Clarise's story—how he and his son had celebrated after the ball. How he, Jack, had personally paid for his son's pleasure after they had taken Clarise back to the hotel.

Jack's story was no less amusing nor more distasteful than many heard in the men's locker room at the club, but Clarise had apparently forgotten her key—she had that apologetic look still frozen on her face—and had come up behind us during the telling of it.

"That's a lie, Jack," she said as I scrambled to my feet.

"Is it?" He did not meet her eyes.

"You know it is."

He stood up after a long moment and put his arm about his wife's rigid shoulders.

"Well, if you say it is."

She let herself be led away as if blind.

The next day I found them little changed, really. Clarise was perhaps quieter than usual, but Jack was almost charming, as if

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recognizing the continual imposition of the problems of their marriage on me was more than even a junior officer of the company might be expected to bear. I found their invitation to accompany them to the falls too awkward to refuse.

We went by hired car into the mountains, the Raniers in the back seat, I beside the driver. I didn't have to look at them and only was called on from time to time to respond to one of Jack's off-color jokes or dogmatic assertions concerning the Indonesian political situation.

The mountains were cool and pleasant, if made somewhat less than enjoyable by the madness of our driver, who seemed to have genuine suicidal tendencies.

As we alighted from the car at the beginning of the path which led to the edge of the cliff which was part of the headwall of the ——— Gorge, I remember Clarise laughing at something her husband said concerning the drive up, and I relaxed, thinking that once again the relationships of other couples was too complex to be judged by an outsider such as myself. It was a predictably serene place, deserted except for ourselves, our driver, and a few peddlers who eagerly surrounded us. Along the path stood a few corrugated, rust-eaten stands which housed more carvings, krises, and the like.

I lagged behind them as Jack hurriedly brushed through the peddlers, my eye being caught by the slender figure of a girl who offered me an ivory fan. But the price was higher even than at the hotel and I soon went after the others.

Jack was leaning out over the abyss, one foot braced on a large rock, his camera lens I suppose framing the rainbow in the spray of the waterfall. It was just at that moment that I saw Clarise place her hand on her husband's shoulder and Jack slip into eternity.

Some natives far below us set up a commotion, and the next few hours were spent surrounded by various officials while the body was recovered. Clarise and I were never really alone again.

No one had seen Jack fall but ourselves, and even if I had been certain that there had been purpose in that casual hand on her husband's shoulder, it would have been too difficult, and certainly too inconvenient, for me to try to be the instrument of justice in such a languid and confused country. I wasn't even sure if they had courts of law, since their police force seemed to exist only for the purposes of restoring the lost children of foreigners and taking reports of their missing valuables.

I did see her at the hotel for a moment, when the waves of officials

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parted just as she was leaving. "Here," she said, "I'd like you to have this." She thrust the clock into my hands.

I searched her eyes for some hint, some confirmation of my monstrous suspicion: that to protect and preserve the fragile fabric of memory, she had caused her husband's death.

"Thank you," I said.

We must have spoken then briefly of other things I've long since forgotten—of departure times and plans and mutual promises of questionable sincerity. But she smiled then a smile I thought at the time she must have kept put away for years, folded in the tissue-paper at the bottom of the bureau along with Richard's medals, a smile brilliant and alive and full of hope, the smile of the lovely girl she must have been not so long ago.

Then she was gone and I was left confused and uneasy. I turned the clock over in my hands, not really seeing it. I supposed at the time she wanted to give me something that had meaning for us both, for me to remember her by. But I thought later that was just my vanity, that she had little regard for the clock itself, it having served its purpose. It was just another card spent in the brutal and complicated game she played with her husband.

Still, I've kept it all these years—packed it and unpacked it through countless moves, as if there were some truth still lingering about its smooth green glass that I might yet discern. Or maybe I've kept it all these years to remind myself of my own weakness for women in soft white dresses.

There is just one more thing I remember, and sometimes I wonder if I might not have dreamed it in the way I might have dreamed that moment at the cliff's edge when I saw Jack slip without a sound into the mist.

Some weeks later, after Clarise had gone back to the States, one night late at the club I brought up to Harry Gill the name of Richard Ranier, the couple's son. Harry, who was in personnel, said that his recollection was that they had no son, that Jack had told him with the direct crudeness that was characteristic of Jack that he and his wife always had wanted children but through some youthful indiscretion of his they were unable to have any. Harry said he'd check the records for me if I was really interested, but I left Sumatra shortly thereafter due to the increased seriousness of the condition of my wife.

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THE COMEBACK

by SUZANNE JONES

Mime Kroder Anderson sipped her champagne and watched with envious eyes the screen of the television set which provided the only light in the darkened room. Her eyes, large and luminous, followed the tiny figures in their graceful, complicated sequences: back and forth, always back to center, rhythmic, hypnotic. There was no sound. Mime couldn't bear the voice-over of that particular commentator. She clicked her tongue as racket met ball, simulating the sound of the hit. She remembered that someone doing color had once likened the sound of the hit to the pop of the cork of a champagne bottle.

She absently rubbed the red welts which curled like worms about her knee. Former U.S. Open champion, runner-up at Wimbledon and the Australian in that, her best, year. But that was some years ago, and her lean, intense features had softened—blurred by time and wine, she would have thought with some regret, had she thought at all, but she did not. Carefully, did not think as she watched the point played to its conclusion. This time she had resolved to think only of the game and the players.

Domino was playing well, intelligently, but Martina would beat her despite her cleverness. Martina beat everyone, and Mime felt no jealousy. The last time Mime had played Martina, Martina was hardly more than a child, and she had beaten her handily, but that was the year Mime had won the Federation Cup and was at the top of her game while the other was just a chubby girl with a forehand.

No, she didn't begrudge Martina her victory, though Mime used to have to struggle sometimes herself to beat Domino. Domino had always been clever, but now Domino was getting old, and cleverness was no substitute for young legs. Domino should stick to doubles. She was doing very well with that big blonde from West Germany whose name at the moment escaped Mime. No, those soft, spinning moonballs to the baseline she was sending Martina would just delay the result, not change it.

Mime sighed, and her resolution again slipped away. Just to be

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there. Just to be able to take the court in a major. But now she could no longer range the court with her long loose strides, running down those soft lobs and sending them back with pace and precision with the sweetest backhand in the game. Her knee weakened, was fixed, tore, and was fixed again, and still again—until it was as clear to Mime as it was much earlier to everyone else that she would never take center court again.

Billie Jean kept coming back, Mime would remind herself. But they were entirely different types of players. There was less power, more finesse in Mime's game, and she had to run and run and run her opponent into the ground. And Billie Jean was five years younger. So Billie Jean played on, and Mime had her trophies, her husband, her house in Denver, and her wine.

Until this morning when Andy, while pruning the Chicago Peace of which he was so fond, had said he was leaving her. Mime stood in the bright sun, champagne glass in one hand, the other resting on a now ample hip, and knew somehow that the words he was speaking were real and not a product of the first bottle of the day.

It was the week of the French Open, and Mime always switched to champagne during a major. And for this major it was particularly appropriate since her retirement was almost two years to the day before the French. She had never done very well in the French anyway, and it was as good a time as any to quit.

At the press conference: What will I do? I'll finally spend some time with my husband, who has devoted himself to managing my career all these years.

Well, she had to tell them something.

She ignored the snickers of the players, who found Andy less than an ideal object of devotion. She had married, she sometimes admitted to herself, not out of any consuming passion, or even strong affection, but to avoid the sort of distracting rumor that was whispered about some of the better women players on the tour. While marriage had not saved Billie Jean from scandal, Mime, married, felt safer from that particular rumor.

The truth, she thought as she looked at the top of Andy's perspiring bald head, was that she was attracted to neither men nor women. She thought, on the whole, that she preferred the company of men since she found them less devious, but her passion was for the game: the feel of the grass, cut so short it seemed hardly grass at all, the crisp white of the chalk lines, the nervous gallop of the ball

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boys—and, above all, that feeling that only comes on winning, that almost sexual rush through the body.

Now she listened to Andy punctuate his bitter sentences with the snap of the pruning shears.

He was leaving her, he said, for everything he had ever wanted. For a woman who would bear his children, which Mime never had time for. For a woman whose life was centered on him, not the reverse.

Mime sipped her champagne and turned these statements over in her mind, sorting through them curiously, calmly.

She shrugged. "So leave. Supporting yourself will entertain us enormously." Her voice was deep, throaty, still with the slight accent after all the years in America.

"Ah." For the first time he raised his head and looked at her face with its familiar expression of contempt. He smiled then, and Mime was uneasy. It was less warm out than she had thought. It was early June, but the sun seemed to give no heat. "Support myself? An honest day's work, you mean? Fortunately, that won't be necessary. You sign things, my dear Mime, so carelessly. Your impatience with the details of finance I found charming in the beginning. Then I found it irritating. Finally, I found it useful. It's been some time now since I confused your ignorance with innocence, your laziness with trust.

"So I began a few years ago to transfer things into my name—"

"What things?"

"Oh, deeds. Titles. Stock. Mortgages. Oh—and, yes, this house." Andy smiled. "You've never spent much time here, whereas this is where I've mainly lived. This is where my friends are. I like having a Cherry Hills address, whereas you're indifferent where you are if you're not on court. Enough wine and you don't even *know* where you are, let alone care."

"Everything?" Mime was now almost sober.

"Not quite. While you've shown me little affection and less consideration over the years, I've managed to invest your winnings conservatively and well. You are—well, were—a very wealthy woman. You might still have been if you'd done what you said when you retired—that is, become a real wife. Cared about me for a change instead of yourself.

"Well, enough of that. Habits of a lifetime. Instead, you've had your television and your wine, and I've left you enough for that, at least, provided you're somewhat more moderate in your consump-

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tion. You'll have to move, of course. Jill and I plan to marry as soon as the divorce is final. She'll be moving in here as soon as you leave. She's got some wonderful plans for landscaping the place."

Mime stared at him as he chattered on. *His* plans, *their* future.

"The court'll be the second thing to go," he said blandly. "Jill doesn't play either."

Mime could not now recall how she limped back into the television room, passing down the long tiled corridor, past the kitchen where the cook was chopping vegetables for lunch. Andy liked his salads fresh. She came to herself again in time to watch Martina repeatedly force Domino into errors. By the middle of the second set, it was all but over, and she allowed herself to examine Andy's remarks.

What he said was undoubtedly true. He had always managed the money, at first with a shy pride she had found amusing, then with an arrogance she had found mildly disconcerting. But she hated dealing with money. In the past it had been enough just to play. She had always lived well, but she had been indifferent to all that. And now that she no longer played, there was the television and the wine. That *was* enough. Why then should it matter so?

She brooded. She took the heavy green bottle from the ice bucket and poured a glass which bubbled merrily, sparkling in the cold light from the television screen.

Then she understood. It was losing that was unacceptable. She had been suspended for six months early in her career because she had struck a linesman in the face. He had been making her lose. No one did that. Ever. She might not always win—but to be made to lose?

She closed her eyes. And to be made to lose by Andy? What would they say, the players? She could just imagine.

Mime held the champagne in her mouth, feeling the prick of the bubbles, tasting its dryness. Good champagne. She had always bought good champagne, good wine. And what was she to do to continue to buy it? Teach tennis to overweight, middle-aged women?

Mime smiled then, and it was a smile Domino would have recognized immediately. She might be down 40–15 on her opponent's serve in the third set, but it wasn't over yet.

The face of the commentator she detested appeared on the screen to wrap up the match with the obligatory interviews. Mime snapped off the set.

She rummaged in a closet for a sweater, and after a short search

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came up with shoes and a tennis bag. The leather of the bag felt hard and unyielding. It hadn't been used for a long time. She slung it over her shoulder and made her way past the kitchen where she ignored the cook's entreaties concerning lunch, down the corridor, and through the rose garden where Andy was no longer visible. She supposed he had hurried off to be with her—what was her name?

She shook her head impatiently to rid it of the thoughts that buzzed and stung as she made her way down the neat gravel path to the court. It had been over a year since she had been there, but Andy and Zeke, who did most of the ground work, kept it up. Kept it swept. She hadn't questioned why, but now she was grateful. The vines climbing on its wire fence were thicker than she remembered but hadn't fully leafed out yet.

She stared at the combination lock on the small shed. Of course, it was locked. Then she smiled, remembering the English mnemonic: "Hit."

The ball machine was dusty and she was doubtful as she wheeled it into position, but it coughed the balls dutifully over the net. She made a few adjustments and then took her position.

It was going to be harder than she thought. Her timing was horrible. She found herself thinking of herself as a little girl on the estate of her father's employer in Luxembourg. "Step and turn and hit. Bend. Take it early. Watch. Watch."

She had gotten very drunk a year or so ago and come down at midnight under a full moon. (There were no lights on the court. Mime hated to play under lights.) She had hit and hit and missed and missed until she cried. She supposed Andy had put the ball machine away. He had a great respect for property.

She began to perspire, but she was getting it back. Step and hit and step and hit. The knee was getting sore—the worms writhed angrily—and it would be stiff tomorrow, but there was no match tomorrow. She reloaded the machine. Step and hit. Bend, bend, bend.

Everything shrank for her. The house above disappeared. The sound of the traffic died away. The vines blurred to a green wall. There were only the lines, the cough of the ball machine, and the pop of the racket on the ball.

She broke a string and hurled the racket away impatiently and seized another. The sun climbed higher in the sky. She was hot now. She had discarded her sweater.

She reloaded the machine. She lost count of the times. Step and hit, step and hit.

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She broke another string. All right. Enough. She let the racket clatter to the surface of the court.

It was still there—that remembered, unnatural motion. The vines regained their definition, the traffic its noise. She became aware again of the birds. She wiped her face on a towel that now smelled of stale sweat and dust. She left the machine where it was. The court was awash with balls that skittered out of her way as she let herself out the gate and closed it carefully behind her. She remembered Andy's phrase, habits of a lifetime.

She limped slowly up the path. Apart from the stiffness growing in the knee, her body felt loose and good. She lifted her head and drank in the sweetness of the late afternoon. Andy's roses were in first bloom, dazzling in their perfection. Her eyes surveyed the grounds as if for the first time as she approached the back of the large house. It was really lovely here in the spring. She wished now that she had come out to see the lilacs when they were at the height of their glory. Now their blossoms were faded, the bushes making up the hedge bore just the faintest traces of color. Next year, she thought, I must remember to pay attention to the lilacs.

Domino stared at the television set. It was getting late in the morning, but she was not playing until tomorrow, still alive in the doubles. They would leave shortly to practice, but now it was a way to pass the time. She could hardly believe what she was seeing. She recognized the lean features at once. Domino's French was excellent and she called excitedly to her partner, "Come, look at this!"

Gretchen Stobe was a little cross at being so summoned from the sensational magazine she had been perusing with great interest, but she listened attentively. Her French was not as good as Domino's.

She, too, was astonished. "Mime Kroder's husband? That little man murdered?"

"The right side of his face was smashed in. Blunt instrument and all that."

Gretchen stifled a giggle. "Who on earth would want to kill Andy except Mime?"

"Some burglar, they think." Domino frowned, trying both to translate and listen to her friend. "They think he must have surprised him."

"How heroic," Gretchen said. "But how awkward for Mime. Exit one object of devotion."

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"Not as awkward for Mime as other exits little Andy might have made. Anyway, I think she might fare better as a widow than a wife. Certainly better a widow than a grass widow. Besides, Andy never struck me as very heroic," Domino said thoughtfully.

Gretchen wasn't too sure of the difference in widows. Her English was a little limited. "Very unlucky, then. But lucky for Mime that she's a right-hander," said Gretchen, whose reading tastes after sex articles ran to mysteries. "Fewer embarrassing questions for her, I'd expect."

There was a pause, then Domino began to smile. "She might be out of practice, but it was the strength of her game."

Gretchen, who really was very bright, caught her meaning at once.

"Backhand," they cried in unison and laughed, and thought their timing augured well for tomorrow.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

ADVANTAGE TAKEN

by MARK GRENIER

To the shamus she said, "It's alarming.
I must shoot you—and yet you are charming."
But her plan was undone
When he wrested her gun
And remarked, "I am also disarming."

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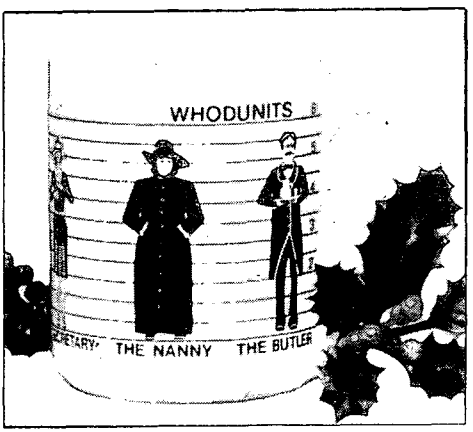

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a distinguished reprint by

MARY HIGGINS CLARK

Mary Higgins Clark, author of the bestselling Where Are the Children?, A Stranger Is Watching, The Cradle Will Fall, *and* A Cry in the Night, *has a new novel,* Stillwatch, *due this fall from Simon & Schuster, with a story line that sounds absolutely terrifying—and wonderful.*

Mary's special skill with suspense goes back to her beginnings as a writer. The first writing course she took, the instructor told her to write about what she knew—to take a true incident in her life and make it into fiction. Mary's first job out of school had been as a stewardess with Pan American Airlines, flying into and out of Prague just as it was being closed to American planes and there were regular searches for dissidents being smuggled out. The story that follows was the result of her instructor's advice and Mary Higgins Clark's first published fiction. She has never, incidentally, forgotten the usefulness of this particular advice. At a talk she gave at the New York Public Library last December she said, "Everything is grist for the mill . . ."

STOWAWAY

by MARY HIGGINS CLARK

Carol shivered inside her smoke-blue uniform coat and tried to ignore her growing uneasiness. As she glanced around the waiting room of the air terminal she thought that the gaily dressed peasant dolls in the showcases made an incongruous background for the grim-faced policemen who passed in front of them. The handful

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of boarding passengers, watching the policemen, were standing together, their eyes full of hatred.

As she walked toward them, one of the passengers was saying: "The chase is taking too long. The hunters are not pleased." He turned to Carol. "How long have you been flying, stewardess?"

"Three years," Carol answered.

"You look too young for even that length of time. But if you could have seen my country before it was occupied. This room was always full of gaiety. When I returned to America from my last visit, twenty relatives came to see me off. This time no one dared come. It isn't wise to make a public display of one's American connections."

Carol lowered her voice. "There are so many more policemen today than usual. Do you know why?"

"A member of the underground has escaped," he whispered. "He was spotted near here an hour ago. They'll surely catch him, but I hope I don't see it."

"We'll be boarding the plane in fifteen minutes," Carol answered reassuringly. "Excuse me. I must see the Captain.

Tom had just come in from the Operations Office. He nodded when his eyes met hers. Carol wondered how much longer it would be before her heart stopped racing painfully at every glimpse of him, before she stopped being so aware of his splendid tallness in the dark uniform. She reminded herself sternly that it was time she regarded him as just another pilot and not as the man she had loved so dearly.

She spoke to him, her grey eyes veiled, noncommittal. "You wanted me, Captain?"

Tom's tone was as businesslike as her own. "I was wondering if you've checked Paul."

Carol was ashamed to answer that she'd not thought of the purser on the flight since they'd landed in Danubia an hour before. Sick from the effect of booster shots, Paul had stayed in the crew bunk while the plane was refueled for the return flight to Frankfurt.

"I haven't, Captain. I've been too interested in the hide-and-seek our friends are playing." She inclined her head in the direction of the police.

Tom nodded. "I'd hate to be that poor guy when they catch him. They're positive he's on the field somewhere."

For a moment Tom's voice was familiar, confidential, and Carol looked at him eagerly. But then he became the Captain speaking

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to the stewardess again. "Please go aboard and see if Paul needs anything. I'll have the ground rep bring the passengers out."

"Right, Skipper." And she walked toward the entrance to the field.

The cold airport seemed desolate in the half darkness of the October evening. Three policemen were entering the plane next to hers. The sight of them made her shiver as she boarded her plane and went forward to find Paul.

He was asleep, so she gently placed another blanket over him and came back to the cabin. Ten minutes more and they'll all be aboard, she thought, checking her watch. She pulled out her hand mirror and ran a comb through the short blonde hair that curled from under her overseas cap.

Just then she realized with a drenching fear that the mirror was reflecting a thin hand grasping the pole of the small open closet behind her seat. *Someone was trying to hide in the tiny recess there!* She glanced frantically out the seat window for help. The police detachment had left the next plane and was heading in her direction.

"Put away the mirror, mademoiselle." The words were quiet, the English clear, the accent a heavy undertone. She heard the hangers being pushed aside. She whirled and faced a thin boy of about seventeen with heavy blonde hair and intelligent blue eyes.

"Please—do not have fear. I will not harm you." The boy glanced out the window at the rapidly approaching police. "Is there another way off this plane?"

Carol's fear changed swiftly. It was for him now that the feeling of disaster swept her. His eyes were frightened and he backed away from the window like a trapped animal, beseeching, urgent, his hand stretched toward Carol, his voice imploring: "If they find me, they will kill me. Where can I hide?"

"I can't hide you," Carol protested. "They'll find you when they search the plane, and I can't involve the airline." She had a clear picture of Tom's face if the police discovered a stowaway on board, especially if she were concealing him.

Feet were ascending the ramp now, heavy shoes clanging on the metal. A loud series of bangs crashed against the closed door.

Carol stared in fascination at the boy's eyes, at the black hopelessness in them. Frantically, she glanced around the cabin. Paul's uniform jacket was hanging in the clothes closet. She pulled it out and snatched his hat off the shelf. "Put these on, quick."

Hope brightened the boy's face. His fingers raced at the buttons

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and he stuffed his hair under the cap. The banging at the door was repeated.

Carol's hands were wet, her fingers numb. She shoved the boy into the rear seat, fumbled at the catch of the ship's portfolio, and scattered baggage declarations in his lap. "Don't open your mouth. If they ask me your name, I'll say Joe Reynolds and pray they don't check the passports."

Her legs seemed too weak to carry her to the cabin door. As she pulled at the handle, the realization of what she was doing swept over her and she thought how pitifully transparent the boy's disguise was. She wondered if she could possibly keep the police from searching the plane. The handle turned and the door swung open. She blocked the entrance and forced an annoyed tone as she faced the policemen. "The steward and I are checking our papers. What's the reason for this?"

"Surely you are aware that a search is being made for an escaped traitor. You have no right to hinder the police in its work."

"*My* work is being hindered. I'll report this to the Captain. You have no right to enter an American plane."

"We are searching every plane on the field," the leader snapped. "Will you step aside? It would be unpleasant to have to force our way in."

Realizing it was no use to argue, Carol quickly sat on the seat next to the boy, her body shifted toward him, her back shielding him from the direct view of the police. His head was bowed over the papers. In the dim light, his uniform was passable, and the absence of a tie was not noticeable in his hunched position.

Carol pulled some declarations off his lap and said: "All right, Joe, let's get this finished. 'Kralik, Walter, six bottles cognac, value thirty dollars. One clock, value—' "

"Who else is aboard?" the leader asked.

"The purser, who's asleep in the crew bunk," Carol said nervously. "He's been very ill."

The inquisitor's gaze passed over "Joe" without interest. "No one else? This is the only American plane here. It is the logical one for the traitor to head for."

The second policeman had checked the lounges, the clothes closet, and the floor under the seats. The third member of the party came back from the flight deck. "There is only one man there, asleep. He is too old to be our prisoner."

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"He was spotted near here fifteen minutes ago," the leader snapped. "He must be somewhere."

Carol glanced at her watch. One minute of eight. The passengers must be starting across the field. She had to get rid of the police, hide the boy—in one minute.

She stood up, careful to keep her body directly in front of Joe. By glancing out the opposite window, she could see the waiting-room door opening. She said to the leader: "You've searched the plane. My passengers are about to board. Will you please leave?"

"You seem strangely anxious to be rid of us, stewardess."

"My paperwork isn't finished. It's difficult to do it while I'm tending the passengers."

Steps were hurrying up the ramp. A messenger came in and said to the leader, "Sir, the Commissioner wants an immediate report on the search."

To Carol's relief, all three policemen scurried out.

The ground representative and passengers were at the foot of the ramp as the policemen descended. The crew were entering the plane through the forward entrance.

"Joe!" Carol called. The boy was out of the seat, crouching in the aisle. Carol pulled him into the tail and pointed to the men's lounge. "In there. Take off the uniform and don't open the door for anyone except me."

She stood at the cabin door and forced a smile at the ground rep and passengers. The ground rep handed her the manifest and waited while she greeted the passengers and showed them their seats.

There were six names on the manifest. Five were typed, and the last one, "Vladimir Karlov," had been written in. Next to it were four letters, "exco."

"Extreme courtesy—who's the VIP?" Carol asked the ground rep softly.

"A real big-shot, the Commissioner of Police in Danubia. He's one of their worst butchers, so handle him with kid gloves. He stopped to talk to the searching party about the escaped prisoner."

The Commissioner—on her flight! Carol felt sick, but as he climbed the ramp she extended her hand, smiling. He was a tall man of about fifty with thin nostrils, tight lips.

"I have been assigned to seat forty-two."

Carol knew she couldn't let him sit in the rear of the plane. He'd be sure to see "Joe" when she brought him out of the lounge. "It's

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a beautiful flight to Frankfurt," she said, her smile easy. "It would be foolish not to sit in front of the wing—"

"I prefer a rear seat," he said. "It gives a considerably smoother flight."

"This hop is one of our smoothest runs. The front seats won't be bumpy and will give you a better view."

The Commissioner shrugged and followed her down the aisle. She glanced at the manifest and debated whether to seat him with another passenger. If she did, they might start a conversation and he'd be less likely to be looking around when she brought Joe out of the lounge. But then, remembering the passengers' bitter comments about the search, she decided against it, led him to seat three, placed his bag on the overhead rack, and told him to fasten his seatbelt.

The passenger in seat seven got up and started to walk to the rear. Carol caught up to him at the door of the men's lounge. "Sir, please take your seat. The plane is starting to move."

The man's face was white. "Please, stewardess. I may be ill. I get a little frightened at takeoff."

Carol took his hand and forced him to let go of the doorknob before he realized it was locked. "I have some pills that will help. Everyone must be in his seat until we're aloft."

After she'd seen him seated, she snapped on the mike. "Good evening, I am your stewardess, Carol Dowling. Please fasten your seatbelts and don't smoke until the sign over the forward door goes off. Our destination is Frankfurt, our anticipated flight time two hours and five minutes. A light supper will be served shortly. Please don't hesitate to ask for anything you want. A pleasant trip, everyone."

When she went to the flight deck, the plane had stopped taxiing and the engines were thundering. She bent over Tom. "Cabin secure, Captain."

Tom turned so quickly that his hand brushed against her hair. She felt a warm glow from the touch and unconsciously raised her hand to her hair.

"Okay, Carol."

The engines were racing—it was hard to catch his words. A year ago he would have looked up at her and his lips would have formed, "Love you, Carol," but that was over now. She had an instant of fierce regret that they hadn't somehow made up their quarrel. On sleepless nights, she'd admitted to herself that Tom had tried: he'd made overtures, but she hadn't given an inch. So his attempts at

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making up had only ended in worse quarrels, and then he'd been stationed in London for six months so they hadn't seen each other. And now they were on a flight together, two polite co-workers giving no hint that things had ever been different.

She started to turn back to the cabin, but Tom motioned her to wait. He nodded to the first officer and the engines became subdued. She felt an immense loneliness when he turned away from her. There had been a few moments on this flight when he'd seemed friendly, warm—moments when it looked as though they might be able to talk things through. But this will finish it, she thought. Even if I can get Joe to Frankfurt, Tom will never forgive me.

"Carol, did you speak to the Commissioner yet?"

"Just when I showed him his seat. He's not very chatty."

"Take good care of him. He's important. They're talking about closing Danubia to American planes. If he likes the service, it might help a little. I'll send Dick back to give you a hand with dinner once we're aloft."

"Don't! I mean, it's just a cold supper. With only six passengers, I can manage."

Back in the cabin, she smiled reassuringly at the man afraid of takeoffs as she passed him. The plane had reached the runway and the crescendo of engines was deafening. All the passengers, including the Commissioner, were staring out the windows. She went back, tapped on the door of the men's lounge, and softly called to Joe.

Noiselessly, he slipped out. In the dim light, his thin body seemed more like a shadow than a human creature. She put her lips to his ear. "The last seat on the right. Get on the floor. I'll throw a blanket over you."

He moved warily and disappeared into the seat recess. He walks like a cat, Carol thought. Or like a kitten, she amended, remembering the boyish fuzz that had brushed her face.

It was hard to balance in the ascending plane and, steadying herself by one hand on the lounge bulkhead, she took the aisle seat by Joe, flipped a blanket from the overhead rack, and threw it over him, shaking it wide. To a casual glance, the blanket might not seem unusual; to a searching glance, it would be odd that anything so shapeless could make such a thick mound.

She glued her eyes to the sign over the cabin door. FASTEN YOUR SEATBELTS—NO SMOKING. *Attacher vos veintures—ne fumer pas.* While the sign was on, she had a reprieve, a safe island. But when

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it flashed off she'd have to turn on the bright cabin lights that would make a farce out of Joe's hiding place and let the passengers leave their seats.

For the first time she seriously considered what would happen to her for concealing Joe. She thought about what Tom would say and remembered unhappily his reaction last year when she'd caused trouble on his ship.

"But, Tom," she'd protested, "what if I did let that poor kid take her dog out of the crate? She was traveling alone, to be adopted by strangers. It was night and the cabin was dark. No one would have known if that woman hadn't gone over to her and got nipped for her trouble."

And Tom had retorted: "Carol, maybe someday you'll learn to obey basic rules. That woman was a stockholder and raised Cain in the front office. I took the blame for letting the dog loose because I knew it wouldn't cost me my job. But after seven years with a clean record, I don't like having a reprimand in my brief now."

She recalled uneasily how she'd flared at him, telling him she was delighted he didn't have a perfect record to live up to any more—that now, maybe, he'd relax and act human—maybe he'd stop treating the company manual like the Bible. It wasn't hard to remember everything they'd said, she'd relived that quarrel so often.

She tried to picture what Charlie Wright, Northern's station manager at Frankfurt, would do. Charlie was a "company man," too. He liked the planes to arrive and depart on schedule, the passengers to be satisfied. Charlie would definitely be upset at having to report a stowaway to the front office and would undoubtedly suspend her immediately or fire her outright.

Joe's blanket moved slightly and her mind jolted back to the problem of finding a safe hiding place for him. The plane leveled off. As the seatbelt sign died, she rose slowly. Hating to do it, she reached for the switch on the bulkhead and turned the cabin lights from dim to bright.

She started to pass out magazines and newspapers. The man who'd been nervous about takeoff was no longer strained-looking. "That pill helped a lot, stewardess." He accepted a newspaper and fumbled for his glasses. "They must be in my coat." He got up and started toward the rear.

Carol said numbly, "Let me get them for you."

"Not at all." He was passing Joe's hiding place—Carol following,

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scarcely breathing. The blanket was glaringly out of place in the tidy cabin. The passenger got his eyeglasses, started back down the aisle, and stopped. Carol swiftly reflected that this man was the *neat* type—hadn't he straightened his coat on the hanger, smoothed the edges of his newspaper? In just one second he'd pick up that blanket. He was bending, saying, "This must have fallen—"

"Oh, please!" Carol's hand was on his arm, her grip firm. "Please don't bother. I'll get it in a minute." She eased him forward, scolding lightly: "You're our guest. If the Captain saw me letting you tidy up, he'd drop me out the window."

The man smiled, but went amiably to his seat.

Carol's eyes searched the cabin hopelessly. The blanket *was* too obvious. Anytime someone went to the rear of the plane Joe could be discovered.

"Magazine, stewardess."

"Of course." Carol brought a selection to the passenger seated behind the Commissioner, then walked forward. "Would you care to see a magazine, Commissioner Karlov?"

The Commissioner's thin fingers were tapping the armrest, his lips pursed in concentration. "Some piece of information eludes me, stewardess. Something I have been told does not fit in. However—" he smiled coldly "—it will come back to me. It always does." He waved away the magazine. "Where is the water fountain?"

"I'll get you a glass of water—" Carol said.

He started to rise. "Don't bother, please. I detest sitting so long. I'll get it myself."

The water fountain was opposite the seat where Joe was hiding. The Commissioner was not a naive observer. He'd be sure to investigate the blanket.

"No!" She blocked the way into the aisle. "The flight's getting bumpy. The Captain doesn't want the passengers moving."

The Commissioner looked significantly at the unlighted seatbelt sign. "If you will let me pass—"

The plane tilted slightly. Carol swayed against the Commissioner, deliberately dropping the magazines. It *was* getting rough.

If she could just stall him, Tom was sure to flash the sign on. The Commissioner, looking exasperated, picked up a few of the magazines.

Still blocking his way, she slowly picked up the others, carefully sorting them by size. Finally, unable to delay any longer, she straightened up. And the seatbelt sign was flashing!

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The Commissioner leaned back and studied Carol intently as she went to the tank, drew him a glass of water, and brought it to him. He didn't thank her but instead observed, "That sign seemed like a direct answer to a plea of yours, stewardess. It must have been important to you that I did not leave my seat."

Carol felt panic, then anger. He knew something was up and it amused him to watch her squirm. She took his barely touched glass. "Sir, I'm going to let you in on a trade secret. When we have a very important passenger on board, a mark is made next to his name on the manifest. That symbol means we're to show every courtesy to that person. You're that passenger on this flight and I'm trying to make your trip as pleasant as possible. I'm afraid I'm not succeeding."

The flight-deck door opened and Tom stepped down. The passengers were all seated near the front half of the cabin. Carol stood by the last one. The odds were that Tom merely wanted to say hello to them. He wouldn't bother going all the way through with no one seated in back.

Tom welcomed the Commissioner, shook hands with the man behind him, pointed out a cloud bank to the two friends playing checkers. Carol studied his movements with vast aching. Every time she saw him a different memory flashed back. This time it was Memorial Day in Gander and their flight was canceled because of a freak snowstorm. Late that night, she and Tom had had a snowball fight. Tom had looked at his watch and said: "Do you realize in two minutes it will be June first? I've never kissed a girl in a snowstorm on June first before." His lips brushed her cheek and were cold, found her mouth and were warm. "I love you, Carol." It was the first time he had said it.

Carol swallowed against the hurt and came back to reality. She was standing in the aisle and Tom was before her and Joe was in danger and there was no way out.

"Sure you don't want help with dinner, Carol?" His tone was impersonal but his eyes searched hers. She wondered if he had flashes of remembering, too.

"No need," she said. "I'll start on it immediately." It would mean going up to the galley and leaving Joe for anyone to discover, but—

Tom cleared his throat and seemed to search for words: "How does it feel to be the only woman on board, Carol—"

The words hung in Carol's mind for seconds before their full import

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sank in. She gazed from passenger to passenger: the Commissioner, the man afraid of takeoffs, the mild fortyish one, the elderly man sleeping, the two friends at checkers. Men, all men. She'd prayed for a hiding place for Joe, and Tom of all people had pointed it out! The ladies' lounge! Perfect. And so simple.

Now, as Tom studied her, she said casually: "I love being the only woman here, Captain. No competition."

Tom started to go forward and hesitated. "Carol, have coffee with me when we get to Frankfurt. We've got to talk."

It had come. He missed her, too. If she said to him now, "I've discovered a stowaway on board," it would be so easy. Tom could take the credit and Danubia would be grateful. It might mean Northern's charter being extended and make up to him for last year's trouble. But she couldn't murder Joe even for Tom's love. "Ask me in Frankfurt if you still want to," she said.

After Tom had gone back to the flight deck, she returned to the seat beside Joe and studied the passengers swiftly. The checker game was absorbing the two players. The elderly man dozed. The fortyish man watched clouds. The neat one was bent over his newspaper. The Commissioner's head was leaning against the back of the seat. It was too much to hope he was napping. At best he was in deep thought and might not turn around.

She leaned over the blanketed form. "Joe, you've got to get to the rear of the plane. The ladies' lounge is on the left. Go in and lock the door."

Just then she met the Commissioner's glance as he turned in his seat. "Joe, I've got to turn the lights off. When I do, get out of there fast! Do you understand?"

Joe slipped the blanket from his head. His hair was tousled and his eyes blinked in the strong light. He looked like a twelve-year-old roused from a sound sleep. But when his eyes got used to the light, they were the eyes of a man—weary, strained.

His faint nod was all Carol needed to assure her that he understood. She got up. The Commissioner had left his seat and was hurrying toward her.

It took her a second to cross to the light switch and plunge the cabin into darkness. Cries of alarm came from the passengers. Carol made her cries louder than the rest. "I'm sorry! How stupid of me! I can't seem to find the right switch—"

The click of a door closing—had she heard it or merely wanted to hear it?

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"Turn on that light, stewardess." An icy voice, a rough hand on her arm.

Carol threw the switch and stared into the face of the Commissioner—a face distorted with rage.

"Why?" His voice was furious.

"Why what, sir? I merely intended to turn the microphone on to announce dinner. See—the mike switch is next to the lights."

The Commissioner studied the panel, uncertainty crossing his face. Carol turned the mike on. "I hope you're hungry, everybody. I'll serve dinner in minutes, and while you're waiting we'll have a cocktail. Manhattans, martinis, or daiquiris. I'll be right there to get your orders." She turned to the Commissioner and said respectfully, "Cocktail, sir?"

"Will you have one with me, stewardess?"

"I can't drink while I'm working."

"Neither can I."

What did he mean by that, Carol wondered, passing the cocktail tray. More cat-and-mouse stuff, she decided as she yanked prepared food from the cubbyhole refrigerator in the galley and made up trays. She took special pains with the Commissioner's dinner, folding the linen napkin in creases and pouring the coffee at the last minute to keep it steaming hot.

"Aren't there usually two attendants?" the Commissioner asked as she placed the tray in front of him.

"Yes, but the purser's ill. He's lying down."

She served the others, poured second coffees, brought trays to the crew. Tom turned over the controls to the first officer and sat at the navigator's table. "I'll be glad when we get to Frankfurt," he said uneasily. "With this tail wind, we should be in in half an hour. I've been edgy this whole flight. Something seems wrong, but I can't put my finger on it." He grinned. "Maybe I'm just tired and need some of your good coffee, Carol."

Carol pulled the curtain from the crew bunk up slightly. "Paul certainly has been asleep a long time."

"He just woke up and asked me to get his jacket. He wanted to give you a hand. But I made him stay put. He feels rotten."

Joe's fate was hanging in such delicate balance. If Paul had come back, he'd have seen Joe. If Paul's jacket hadn't been hanging in the cabin, the police would have found Joe. If Tom hadn't said she was the only woman aboard—

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"I'll pick up the trays since we've only a half hour to go," she said.

She started collecting trays from the passengers, working her way forward. The Commissioner's tray was untouched. He was staring down at it. A premonition warned Carol not to disturb him. She cleared and stacked the other trays. But then her wristwatch told her they'd land in ten minutes. The seatbelt sign came on. She went for the Commissioner's tray. "Shall I take it, sir? I'm afraid you didn't eat much."

But the Commissioner stood up. "You *almost* got away with it, Miss, but I finally realized what's been eluding me. At Danubia the search party said the purser was ill and the stewardess was checking baggage declarations with the steward." His face turned cruel. "Why didn't a steward help you with dinner? Because there isn't any." His fingers dug into Carol's shoulder. "Our prisoner *did* get on this plane and you've hidden him."

Carol fought rising panic. "Let me go."

"He *is* on board, isn't he? Well, it's not too late. The Captain must take us back to Danubia. A thorough search will be made."

He pushed her aside and lunged for the door to the flight deck. Carol grasped at his arm but he flung her hand away. The other passengers were on their feet, staring.

Her last hope was these men who with bitterness had watched the search. Would they help?

"Yes, there's an escaped prisoner on board!" she shouted. "He's a kid you'd love to shoot, but I won't let you do it!"

For a moment, the passengers seemed frozen as they clutched seat backs for support in the sloping plane. Carol, in utter despair, thought they wouldn't help. But then, as though they finally understood what was going on, they lunged forward together. The mild one threw himself against the Commissioner and knocked his hand from the doorknob. A checker-player pinned his arms behind his back. The plane was circling the field, the airport lights level with the window. A faint bump—Frankfurt!

The passengers released the Commissioner as the flight-deck door opened. Tom stood there, angrily taking in the scene. "Carol, what the devil is going on?"

She went to him, shutting her eyes against the Commissioner's hatred, and against the impact of her words on Tom. She felt sick, drained. "Captain—" her tongue was thick, she could barely form the words "—Captain, I wish to report a stowaway . . ."

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She gratefully sipped steaming coffee in the station manager's office. The past hour was a blur of airport officials, police, photographers. Only vivid was the Commissioner's demand: "This man is a citizen of my country. He must be returned immediately." And the station manager's reply: "This is regrettable, but we must turn the stowaway over to the Bonn government. If his story checks, he'll be granted asylum."

She stared at her hand where Joe had kissed it before being taken into custody.

He'd said, "You have given me my life, my future."

The door opened and Charley Wright, the station manager, walked in, followed by Tom. "Well, that's that."

He looked squarely at Carol. "Proud of yourself? Feeling real heroic and dying to see the morning headlines? 'Stewardess hides stowaway in thrilling flight from Danubia.' The papers won't print that Northern won't be welcome in Danubia any more and will lose a few million in revenue because of you. As for you, Carol, you can deadhead home and there'll be a hearing in New York, but—you're fired."

"I expected it. But you've got to understand Tom knew nothing about the stowaway."

"It's a Captain's business to know what goes on in his plane," Charley shot back. "Tom will probably get away with a stiff calldown unless he gets heroic and tries to take the blame for you. I hear from the grapevine he did that once before."

"That's right," Carol said. "He took the blame for me last year and I didn't have the decency to thank him for it." She looked into Tom's strangely inscrutable face. "Tom, last year you were furious with me, and rightly so. I was completely wrong. This time, I'm truly sorry for the trouble you'll have over this but I couldn't have done otherwise."

She turned to Charley, fighting tears. "If you're finished, I'm going to the hotel. I'm dead."

He looked at her with some sympathy. "Carol, unofficially I can understand what you did. Officially—"

She tried to smile. "Good night." She went out and started to walk down the stairs.

Tom caught up with her at the landing. "Look, Carol, let's put the record straight—I'm *glad* the boy got through! You wouldn't be the girl I love if you'd handed him over to those butchers."

The girl I love . . .

"But thank God you won't be flying on my plane any more. I'd be

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afraid to sit at the stick wondering what was going on in the cabin." His arms slipped around her.

"But if you're not on my plane, I wish you'd be there to pick me up at the airport. You can hide spies and dogs and anything you darn please in the back seat. Carol, I'm trying to ask you to marry me."

Carol looked at him, the splendid tallness of him and the tenderness in his eyes. Then his lips were warm against hers and he was saying again the words she'd wanted so long to hear, "Love you, Carol."

The waiting room of the terminal was dim and quiet. After a moment, they started down the stairs toward it, their footsteps echoing ahead.

"Q"

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beginning a *NEW* series by

ROBERT P. MILLS

This is the first fiction in EQMM of Robert P. Mills, fifteen years an editor with Mercury Press, then Davis Publications, followed by twenty-three years as a literary agent. Since he quit agenting he has done book-reviewing for The New York Times, *is "noodling on a book notion," and is a free-lance editorial consultant. He would like to precede this first story in his series about Police Chief David Bain and the peaceful village of Bickenton with the following:*

NOTE! Although Chief Bain has testified that the events recorded here are exact and true in every detail, he has suggested that the names be changed to protect the guilty. However, it was felt by this reporter that in the interests of historical accuracy no such changing should be done . . .

THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING GOLD

by ROBERT P. MILLS

Last night, Monday, had been relatively peaceful in the village of Bickenton—one case of spitting on the sidewalk and one of wife-beating—and Police Chief David Bain was satisfied with the way he had handled each. It is, as Clem Bowdler had said, very hard not to spit on the sidewalk when you're chewing tobacco sitting on a bench on the other side of the sidewalk from the road, and if your leg is in a cast because it got broken in a bicycle race, you're not about to walk over to the road every time you have to spit. Chief Bain saw the inescapable logic there and told Clem he'd let him off

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this time, but next time he'd best be sure to use one of the empty coffee cans the Chief set around him. . . You've got to be creative-minded if you're going to be Police Chief, he thought.

The wife-beating case was a bit trickier, but potentially more rewarding, Chief Bain permitted himself to hope.

Nancy Charlton had registered a complaint about nine o'clock and by nine-ten the Chief was knocking on the Charlton door. Max had let him in and invited him to have a cup of coffee. There was a deck of cards on the kitchen table which the Chief fingered idly as they talked.

"Nancy tells me you've been beating her," Chief Bain said, "and she doesn't like it."

"Well, now, Chief," Max said placatingly, "you know and I know it's a good thing for a man to beat his wife from time to time—helps him keep his dignity."

"I've got to agree with that," Bain said, "but not when you do it in a dishonorable fashion. That's what Nancy suspects you of, and I can tell by these cards that she's got the right of it. And I don't think it's very smart of you—I mean, who's going to believe you beat her ten straight hands at gin rummy if you were being honest? These cards are *marked*, Max. If word got out about this, your credit down at Baird's General Store could be cut off."

Max looked down at his now-twitching hands, shame-faced and shame-handed. "I guess you're right, Chief," he muttered.

"Tell you what I'm going to do, Max. If you swear to me you're not going to do anything underhanded like this again, I won't tell anybody what I know. And I'm going to take these cards along with me to save you from temptation. Is that all right with you?"

"It sure is!" Max said gratefully. "And I thank you for not spreading it around. I swear I won't do it again, even if I have to lose eight out of ten games from now on."

The Chief nodded approvingly, finished his coffee, and stood up. "Glad you see it my way, Max. Good night now." As he moved toward the door with the cards safely in his pocket, he was thinking he had a use for them.

Tonight when his Tuesday-night deputy, Ben, came on, there might be time for a few hands of five-card stud before he went on home to see *The A Team* on his new color TV set. He was lucky Ben didn't watch that show and was willing to sit in on Tuesday nights—*The A Team* had some good ideas about handling tough problems of the sort he might be faced with himself when Bickenton

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got larger. And it was growing by leaps and bounds now. Sort of job-training, you might say. And besides, his son Seth really liked the show, too—gave them a chance for some family togetherness.

It was only 4:00 now, three hours before Ben was due, and the Chief was thinking about how he'd handle his betting—he didn't want to be too greedy, after all—when George Banks came banging in.

"Chief!" he said urgently. "I've been robbed!" He held up the old five-pound sugar sack he was carrying, untied the string tied around the top, and dumped a bunch of dirty rocks on the Chief's desk. "That's what was in the bag when I dug it up, and Andy Charlton told me there'd be gold coins in it!"

"Well, now," said the Chief calmingly, "what say we start from the beginning?"

"Oh—well, I came into town early this morning to mail in my income tax—this is the last day, you know, and I've been out of town since two weeks ago last Sunday. My Aunt Gretchen called me long-distance to say she'd accidentally backed her car into somebody else's garage door and there were problems with insurance and lawyers and stuff and would I please come help.

"When I went to the post office this morning, I found a note from Andy Charlton in my box, one that had been there for over two weeks, telling me he'd found some gold coins on that acre I bought up north of town a few years ago. Bought it because I figure the way the town is growing so fast—two new people two years ago and four last year—that land is going to be really worth something in about ten years, since it's only about four miles out. Anyway, Andy said he'd buried the coins in a bag next to the lone pine tree on the property and after I'd dug it up he'd tell me about where he'd found 'em.

"It wasn't easy—that bag was down about three feet and it's rocky soil out there—and after I got it, there was nothin' but a bag of rocks! We got us a thief around here, Chief, and I don't like it!"

"That sure sounds pretty serious," the Chief said. "I wonder what Andy was doing out there in the first place. He's a funny fellow—you never know what he's going to do next. Tells funny stories, too. Did he ever tell you about the time he was hunting rare butterflies in a Central American jungle?"

George shook his head as he paced nervously back and forth—a

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better way to pace than to and fro, the Chief noted approvingly. He hoped that telling George the story might help calm him down.

"Seems he heard something coming, something that sounded sort of threatening, and he climbed the nearest tree. And out of the dense underbrush crawled, side by side, two *very* long, very large snakes. And just as they got below him, the one on the right hissed to the one on the left, 'Phyllisss, what kind of dangerousss sssnakes are we? Venomousss or constrictorsss?' "

" 'Thomasss, ssstupid, we're constrictorsss!' "

" 'Oh, thank God!' Thomas said. 'I just bit my lip!' "

George didn't respond with a belly laugh, but he did stop pacing and said, "That's pretty good. But what about my gold?"

"Yes," said the Chief forthrightly—he could afford to be forthright because he was being honest—"I've got an idea about that. Let me check it out and I'll get back to you in about twenty minutes. Why don't you go over to the Bridge Café and have a beer? I'll look for you there."

When George had left, Chief Bain picked up the phone and called Laszlo. Laszlo was a talented house-painter, one might very well say artistic, and the man had another name but nobody could pronounce it so he was called just old Laszlo. Laszlo lived in the only house on the road between the village and George's piece of property. After he'd talked to the man for a while, Chief Bain was pretty well convinced he was right about what had happened. He went over to the Bridge Café to put George's mind at rest—or maybe not, depending on George's mood.

George had already finished one short beer and had started on a second, but he put it down quickly when he saw the Chief.

"Well?" he asked.

"The way I've got it figured—" the Chief began just as Andy Charlton walked in. "But there's Andy—maybe he can help us. Hey, Andy!"

"Hi, there," Andy said. "How's it going?"

"Well enough," the Chief told him. "Saw your dad last night—he was looking pretty good."

"Yeah, he told me you were there. He thinks you're a pretty swell guy, Chief. George, where you been? I been looking for you."

"Had to go out of town for a couple of weeks. What'd you want to see me for?"

The Chief interrupted. "I think I know what he wanted—he wanted to say something to you and I'm pretty sure I know what it

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was, but he's fifteen days too late. Do you want to tell him, or shall I, Andy?"

"Yeah," Andy said, embarrassed. "It is fifteen days too late. But I guess I'd better tell him anyway. George, I was going to say, after you got back from that lonesome pine—'April Fool!' "

"That's what I'd figured," the Chief said. "George, when you said you'd come into town today, the fifteenth, because it was your last day to mail in your income tax, it came to me that this being Tuesday, the Monday before last, when you were supposed to get that note, was April first. And knowing Andy the way I do, I wouldn't put it past him to do something complicated like that as a joke. And I called Laszlo out on Popple Swamp Road and he said nobody had driven by his place in the last three weeks except you and Andy—he checked with his wife and kids to be sure."

George looked at the Chief for a long moment, then turned slowly toward Andy.

"I think," he said thoughtfully, "I'm going to kill you."

"Well, now," said the Chief judiciously, "if you do that, you'll be doing what stupid Thomas did, except you won't be as lucky, because if you terminate Andy it'll be like biting your lip, and the venom that will get *you* is right here in this badge I'm wearing. Might be better to try being a constrictor—give Andy a big hug for doing his best to bring a little life into a pretty quiet village, even if you did get a blister or two. What do you say?"

George was silent for what seemed a very long time, and then he began to laugh a big laugh, the big laugh he hadn't gotten out in the Chief's office.

"I'll tell you, Andy, because the Chief says so, I *won't* kill you, but I'll get you somehow. I'll get you. For now, have a beer on me."

"Don't mind if I do," Andy said gratefully.

When the beer was brought, George looked out the window onto the street, a startled look on his face. "Is that *Mary Jane* out there in that skimpy little skirt?" he asked in a shocked tone.

"Where!" Andy asked excitedly. When he turned around to look, George winked at the Chief, grabbed a bottle of vinegar off the bar top, and poured a healthy dollop into Andy's glass.

When Andy turned back, a disappointed look on his face, George said again, "Yessir, Andy, someday, somehow, I'm going to get you!"

And thus, once more, justice was done in the fair village of Bickenton.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

SHERLOCKIANA: Magico Magazine, tireless publisher of Sherlockian items, has brought out three new hardcover books of interest to collectors. All are brief but well produced. *The Use of Disguise in Crime Detection,* "a monograph by Sherlock Holmes, edited by Val Andrews," has a short Introduction by Hugh Pentecost. Price of the trade edition is $12.50, and a limited edition numbered and signed by Andrews and Pentecost is $25.00. *A Study in Pictures,* an authoritative work on the illustrations of the canon, with 32 pages of pictures, is reprinted from the Christmas Annuals of the noted Sherlockian James Montgomery, with an Introduction by Charles R. Reynolds of *Popular Photography* and an appreciation by John Ball. Trade edition is $25.00; limited edition signed by Ball and Reynolds is $40.00.

Sherlock or Porlock by Kelvin James studies the influence of Nineteenth Century writers like Coleridge, Stevenson, Oscar Wilde, and others on Sherlock Holmes (and Conan Doyle). It has a brief Introduction by Edward D. Hoch. Trade edition is $12.50; limited edition signed by Jones and Hoch is $25.00. Magico has also published two brief pamphlets by Jones: *The Carfax Syndrome,* a study of vampirism in the canon ($5.00), and *Upon the Tracing of Footsteps* "by Sherlock Holmes" ($3.00). All prices are postpaid, from Magico Magazine, PO Box 156, New York, NY 10002.

Finally, from Michael Cooke, comes *The Ancient Curse of the Baskervilles,* purporting to be an 1885 volume about the family curse. It's all good fun, at $11.95 hardbound, from Gaslight Publications, 112 East Second, Bloomington, IN 47401.

FROM COMICS TO CRIME FICTION: Max Allan Collins, who has carried on the great tradition of Dick Tracy while also creating his own comic-strip sleuth, Ms. Tree (with Terry Beatty), is well suited to write a critical/biographical study of another comic-book author who turned to mystery writing. *One Lonely Knight: Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer,* by Col-

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lins and James L. Traylor, was published this fall by Bowling Green University Popular Press. The illustrated volume covers all of Spillane's writing, with emphasis on Hammer.

Collins's novel *True Crime,* a sequel to *True Detective,* is due in January from St. Martin's Press. It's illustrated with period photos of Chicago in 1934. And the *Ms. Tree* comic book is now published by Aardvark-Vanaheim, sold mainly through comics specialty shops.

ROSS MACDONALD: Ralph B. Sipper has edited a new collection of writings by and about Ross Macdonald, *Inward Journey* ($25.00 from Joseph the Provider Books, 903 State Street, Suite 201, Santa Barbara, CA 93101). The 200-page hardcover volume contains a 12,000-word essay by Macdonald, a long letter to his publisher, and 25 memoirs, essays, and poems by admirers of Macdonald, including William Goldman, John D. MacDonald, Margaret Millar, Robert B. Parker, Otto Penzler, Reynolds Price, Julian Symons, Eudora Welty, and others. The book includes unpublished photos of Macdonald and his family.

REX STOUT JOURNAL: John McAleer, Edgar-winning biographer of Rex Stout, has begun publication of *The Rex Stout Journal,* a semiannual gathering of articles, letters, and other items of interest to admirers of Stout and Nero Wolfe. The first issue appeared in September. Subscription is $7.00 a year for two issues, from John McAleer, 121 Follen Road, Lexington, MA 02173.

FANZINE UPDATE: Stephen Wright's Mystery Notebook, a quarterly newsletter, devoted most of its second and third issues to Wright's long essay-review of last year's Dashiell Hammett biographies. His recounting of Hammett's life is interesting enough, though he does refer to *Red Harvest* as *Random Harvest* in an obvious slip of the typewriter. The third issue also contains a review of a new play, *Sherlock's Last Case.* Subscription for one year (four issues) is $9.95, from Stephen Wright, PO Box 1341, FDR Station, New York, NY 10150.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: A John Dickson Carr revival, which started last spring and fall with new editions of early Carr novels from Collier Books, continues in the spring of 1985 when Collier will reissue *The Arabian Nights Murder, The Case of the Constant Suicides,* and *Poison in Jest.* Another publisher, Carroll & Graf, has just issued a paperback of Carter Dickson's *Curse of the Bronze Lamp.*

The Best of Ellery Queen, a selection of nearly twenty Queen stories and novelets, is due this month from Beaufort Books. It's edited by Francis M. Nevins, Jr. and Martin H. Greenberg, and contains one or two stories missing from previous Queen collections.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Clint Eastwood has since the demise of Jack Webb become the definitive screen policeman for American audiences—but a far cry from Webb's by-the-book straightness. As Callahan the cop in the incredibly popular Dirty Harry series, he steps outside the law to pursue and execute criminals, chucking his badge at times but somehow getting reinstated as a detective. In his new film, *Tightrope,* he is again a policeman, and still a gritty, single-minded, vengeful loner, but the character is more thoughtful and interesting. While on the surface merely the story of a search for a serial murderer, *Tightrope* stretches Eastwood's increasingly potent contributions to cinema melodrama.

The film begins in familiar back alleys: a woman is killed by a masked assailant in sneakers. Wes Block, homicide detective for the New Orleans Police Department, must uncover a sadistic killer who has struck several times, his victims most often prostitutes. Divorced, with the custody of two growing daughters, Wes finds disturbing elements in his own life which parallel the make-up of the suspect he is tracking—who, it soon turns out, was once also a policeman. "There is a darkness inside all of us—you, me, and the man down the street," the department psychologist explains. "Some of us have it under control, some let it out, but most of us try to walk that tightrope in between." For this sort of killer, moreover, the official pursuing him becomes the most important and interesting figure in his life: a bonding and kinship can often develop between the two. Wes soon finds that, instead of being the pursuer, he himself is cunningly pursued by a mind which can think and outthink like a cop—a career policeman gone sociopath.

Tightrope is also an extraordinarily well photographed film (shot entirely in New Orleans), a dark canvas of mood and shadow that succeeds in making such ordinary sites as a beer-processing factory seem a stroll through Dante's inferno. Eastwood's mystery films all have an intense look. Though making his mark first as a Western hero, after appearing for years as a bit player in Universal melodramas, the actor-director-producer is now even more associated with the suspense thriller. His *Coogan's Bluff* of 1968 made an effective transitional drama. In it he played an Arizona deputy sheriff using sagebrush procedures when he travels to New York City to extradite a killer. Urban crimes were Eastwood's province thereafter. The enormously successful Dirty Harry films began in 1971, with Eastwood as the clenched San Francisco

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policeman using uncondoned, violent methods to rid the city of particularly nasty offenders. While *Magnum Force, The Enforcer,* and *Sudden Impact* are in this series, Eastwood is not a one-note player. He has been a bank robber in a spirited caper film, *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot,* and a prisoner plotting freedom in the grim, realistic *Escape from Alcatraz.* He has successfully tried his hand at espionage in *The Eiger Sanction* and *Firefox.* He appeared as a disc jockey menaced by an obsessive fan in *Play Misty for Me,* a dark, superb suspense film which he also directed.

While Eastwood's crime dramas are nearly always throbbing and tough, he has mastered the craft of the violent mystery film, a noir for our day. His success is no sudden impact.

Cloak and Dagger could not be more different from *Tightrope,* a charming fable about an eleven-year-old boy who outwits master spies, even though no one except an imaginary companion (a dashing CIA agent the child has dubbed Jack Flack) believes him. In part based on the "boy who cried wolf" story by Cornell Woolrich which became the classic RKO film, *The Window* (1949), *Cloak and Dagger* was fashioned by the imaginative Australian thriller director and Hitchcock enthusiast, Richard Franklin (who made his American debut with *Psycho II),* and scripted by Tom Holland (who also wrote the *Psycho* sequel).

The film is delightfully lighthearted, especially in the relationship between the youngster and his conjured-up older friend—something like *Harvey* in a Hardy Boy adventure—and how, at the end, Jack Flack makes his final disappearance. Hitchcockian touches turn up amusingly. But *Cloak and Dagger* (which makes excellent use of its Los Angeles setting) is at its happy best when it charts the thwarting of an actually quite murderous group of enemy agents by one lone kid using an all-city bus pass.

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THE JURY BOX

by ALLEN J. HUBIN

The pure or "Golden Age" detective story sets an explicit challenge before the reader: correctly interpret clues and discard red herrings, and so arrive at the identity of the killer at least as quickly as the fictional sleuth does. The reader's reward for success is usually only a dose of intellectual satisfaction.

Now, however, three series have been launched to add a sizeable stack of cash to that sense of ac-

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complishment. The first, created by Bill Adler and written by Thomas Chastain, began in 1983 with *Who Killed the Robins Family?* The success of that venture spawned both imitators and a sequel, *The Revenge of the Robins Family* (Morrow, $10.95). Here the family is again murderously beset and eight more people die. The reader is showered with clues and asked to answer six questions about each of seven unsolved killings. Unfortunately, the narrative is stiff and clumsy and no particular pleasure to read—perhaps a consequence of efforts to be absolutely fair in retailing the clues. The winner will receive $10,001.

The best series, from the standpoint of storytelling, begins with *Prize Meets Murder* (Pocket Books, $2.95) by R. T. Edwards and Otto Penzler. Here Matthew Prize, California professor and former private investigator, is drawn into murders surrounding an aerobic salon catering to wealthy overweight women. The violence seems to tie to a past jewel robbery in which the loot was never recovered. The narrative is humorous, with enjoyable repartee. Readers vie for a $15,000 pot by answering three questions. Look for future volumes in this series.

The final series is launched with two volumes, *Murder at the 1984 Summer Games* and *Time Runs Out at the Democratic Convention* (HC Publishing, $4.95 each). Both are written by Steve Fawcette and each offers a $10,000 prize for 12 correct answers. These are abundantly bloody, topical affairs. In the first, Russian agents, supported by an unknown psychic, mow down everyone in sight to retrieve defecting athletes. In the second, corpses stack like dripping cordwood when terrorists take over the convention and kidnap the two leading hopefuls for presidential nominee. Suspension of disbelief is required for these; the narration is workmanlike and not without interest.

Centrifuge (Crown, $14.95) by J. C. Pollock falls into the category of "realistic" espionage in which white and black hats merge to indistinguishability and expedience becomes the loftiest of motivations. Mike Slater served in Vietnam and briefly with the CIA; the resulting taste in his mouth not sweet, he turned to peaceful civilian life. Then Vietnam colleagues start dying around him, and he and a buddy hole up in a remote Canadian cabin to take their stand, not knowing who's determined to see them dead, or why. This is churning, graphic suspense.

Roger Ormerod's eighteenth crime novel and first to be published in the U.S. is *The Hanging Doll Murder* (Scribners, $11.95). If it's typical of the author's work, we've been much deprived, for this is an agile, emotionally intense, and engaging tale, with a complex and driven protagonist—altogether a fine novel. Inspector Richard Patton, an unconventional English policeman not beloved of his superior, is days from retirement when a burned-out car attracts his attention. Is it related to Clive Kendall, the hated child rapist and mur-

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derer recently released from prison? Then a shotgun-shredded body —whose?—turns up in an isolated cottage, and Patton is told to stay out of it, he's been replaced.

Martha G. Webb's *Darling Corey's Dead* (Walker, $12.95) is an assured and polished debut. The author has been a policewoman in Georgia and Texas, and focuses on the activities of the little-known Postal Inspection Service, here investigating check fraud and murder in a small Texas town. She rounds out her characters nicely and with much sympathy, treating emotions and conflict smoothly. Under which rock may a multiple killer be found who takes particular pleasure in robbing post offices and shooting postal inspectors?

Another promising debut is *Murder After the Fact* (St. Martin's, $13.95) by Albert Ashforth. Clint Ball returns to his hometown after years of absence when the aunt who'd raised him dies. He'd not much enjoyed the raising or the aunt, and he wants to close the estate quickly and get back out of town. But he discovers his aunt committed murder nearly thirty years earlier, a wealthy businessman accuses him of blackmail, and soon the cops fix beady eyes on him for the fresh killing of a private eye in his aunt's house. For self-preservation, Ball stirs the pot, looking for linkages between deaths and certain curious property transactions. Nicely plotted; only Ball's romantic attractions can't be believed.

Such suspense does Clive Cussler's *Deep Six* (Simon and Schuster, $17.95) generate that it should carry the warning "caution, commence reading only when four hours are available; interruptions can be stressful to health." This continues Cussler's series set in the near future and featuring Dirk Pitt, sea adventurer and deputy director of special projects for the National Underwater and Marine Agency. Here we have as prologue a murder at sea in 1966, then in 1989 release of an awesomely toxic material in Alaska and disappearance of the President and the next two successors to his office. What connects these events is a meticulously planned high-tech Russian scheme to take over the presidency. Cussler swept me into his non-stop caper and made me a believer.

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"Q"

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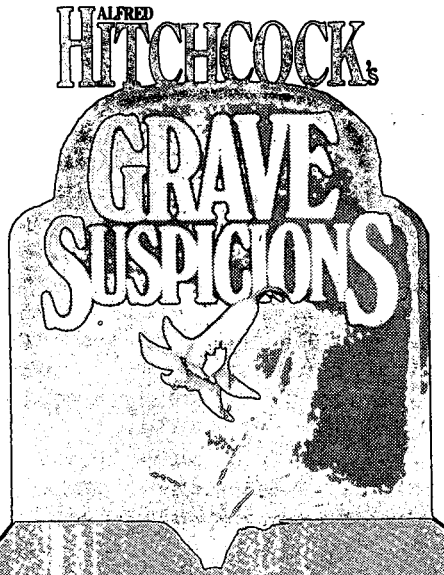

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a *NEW* short story by

CELIA FREMLIN

"Melanie!" Derek was truly shocked. "You're not to talk about the kid like that! It's wicked! After all, he is only a kid, he's—"

"And stop calling him a kid!" Melanie yelled, beside herself by now. "The kid, the kid, the kid! It's one of those slimy, Catch-22 words which extort approval for the bloody child before the argument even starts! Why can't you at least use a neutral word, like the boy or the foundling or the bastard—or whatever the hell he is!"

A story unlikely to be forgotten from Celia Fremlin, who has always written about parents and children with penetration and passion. It's quite strong medicine, we warn you . . .

BLUEBEARD'S KEY

by CELIA FREMLIN

"For God's sake, Melanie, give the kid a chance! Can you wonder he's disturbed? Just think what he's been through! Barely thirteen, and eight different foster homes already!"

And now Muggins for the ninth! Melanie didn't say it aloud, of course, because she understood only too well the anxiety—the panic, really—that lay behind her husband's bluster. Newly promoted in his social-service department, desperately anxious to make his mark, to justify his promotion, Derek had made on his own responsibility this quixotic, this grandly compassionate decision which was fast revealing itself to have been a monumental blunder. Even she—angry though she was at having been dragged so gratuitously into so hideous a predicament—even she couldn't, in all honesty, see a way out of it. How could Derek be expected, now, to go cap-in-hand

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to his humiliatingly much younger colleagues and plead with them to get him out of this mess into which, against their unanimous advice, he had landed himself?

Oh, they would help him, no doubt. Politely, with raised eyebrows, carefully refraining from actually saying "I told you so," they would set about deploying all their bright, youthful expertise to show up the older man's bumbling sentimentality, his shameful inability to handle in a realistic manner the kind of crises which were what the new job was all about. Behind his back, they would sneer and make pitying remarks: "Doesn't know he's born!" "Still wet behind his aging ears!" "No fool like an old fool!" All the remarks, in fact, which Derek had secretly feared people would make, right from the beginning.

For Derek had taken up social work comparatively late in life. A disillusioned schoolteacher already in his late thirties, he had embarked on a social-science course like a drowning man clutching at a raft in the wild hope that here at last, in the field of individual personal problems, he would have a chance to use those gifts of compassion, of empathy, of psychological insight he was sure he possessed, and which he had at one time fondly imagined would stand him in good stead in the vast, multiracial comprehensive school in which he found himself.

They hadn't. Such rarefied virtues stood about as much chance of survival in this environment as rare orchids on a football ground. They were trampled flat within hours by the sheer roaring, stampeding tumult of it all. Derek had come home from his first day like a man in shock—a shock from which, it seemed to Melanie, he never entirely recovered throughout his years of teaching. For he battled on, while Melanie, helpless, racked by anxiety for him, had stood by, watching her husband's bright hopes failing, his principles collapsing, his shining ideals battered into pulp by the impact of reality. As the months and years went by, it seemed to her that his very soul was shriveling as he found himself forced down and down, day after day, into behaving exactly like all those repressive, reactionary martinets of schoolmasters he had spent his bright, teacher-trained youth reviling. Day after day, he would come home to her hoarse with yelling, bitter with the shame of having had to yell, his whole body sagging under the weight of the threats, the punishments, the bawlings-out which all day long he had been administering in the very teeth of everything he had ever believed in.

The idea of switching to social work, albeit in mid-career, had

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been like an inspiration from heaven, and from the moment of its taking root Derek had been a changed man—radiant, bursting with energy, and filled once again with all the old youthful idealism, the confidence in his power to build a better world. And Melanie, although she was already pregnant with Alison, and the drop in income during his two-year training would be punishing, was one hundred percent behind him. *Any* price was worth paying to see her husband happy and fulfilled at last.

And they'd managed, somehow. Luck, as it turned out, was on their side. Alison was a beautiful baby, healthy and uncomplicated, and with a naturally contented disposition which allowed her to be left, untraumatized, with this neighbor or that while Melanie resumed her part-time job. Derek's training grant had been unexpectedly upped during his second year, and at the end he sailed through his exams with flying colors. And even after qualification, his luck still held. They'd feared that, what with the unemployment situation and his relatively advanced years, it might prove difficult for Derek to find a job, but lo and behold almost the perfect post came his way almost at once. And now, after not much more than a year, he'd been promoted to a position of almost frightening responsibility.

No, not almost. *Totally* frightening; and this Melanie was forcing herself to remember, biting back the fury and the revulsion that half choked her whenever she thought about the sullen, evil-tempered little creature that had been landed on her, with his sallow, near-adult face atop his undersized body, and with his unpredictable bouts of destructive malice which had already, in these few days, left their ugly mark on more than one of Melanie's treasured possessions.

"It's his deprived background—don't you understand?" Derek had reproved her when she'd confronted him with Christopher's latest effort—a favorite blouse streaked with shoepolish and with all the buttons ripped off. "You have to remember what he's been through—his mother abandoning him when he was only a baby! Very likely still breast-feeding, and so it may be that, to him, that blouse symbolizes—"

That was how the row had started; and now, at nearly midnight, with Alison in bed and Christopher still sulking in his own room, the quarrel was taking on a new life.

"Have you no compassion for the poor kid?" Derek was expostulating. "I just don't understand how you can be so hard—so unfeeling!

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Think about it! How would *you* feel if *you'd* been shunted from pillar to post the way he has? If *you'd* been rejected from eight different homes, one after another? *Eight!* How would *you* feel?"

"I'd feel I'd better watch my step a bit," Melanie retorted crisply, "and refrain from smashing up my ninth happy home! I'd feel I should reflect on a few of the things it would be politic *not* to do. Like not pushing a teapot of scalding tea over the edge of the table onto the carpet only inches from where a toddler is playing! Like not throwing handfuls of gravel into my hostess's sewing-machine! And not going round the house with an umbrella, poking it at every electric-light bulb I could reach. I'd feel I ought to go easy on that sort of thing. For a while, anyway. That's what I'd feel!"

"Melanie!" His voice rasped with panicky self-righteousness, and she knew she had got him rattled. "Melanie, how can you be so—so *heartless!* So *hard!* Can't you see this destructiveness for what it is—a cry for help? Can't you see that all the poor kid needs is love? Warm, unconditional, non-judgmental, totally accepting—"

"Stop it! Shut up! I can't bear it!" Melanie's hands were over her face as if to ward off these psychological clichés which he seemed to be using as weapons, snatched at random from an inexhaustible pile he kept ready to hand for just such occasions as this. "Stop it! *Love*, indeed! It's not love the little monster needs, it's a bloody good—"

"A bloody good hiding" is not a phrase that falls becomingly from the lips of a social worker's wife. She checked herself just in time, but not before Derek had got the message.

"Melanie!" He was truly shocked. "You're not to talk about the kid like that! It's wicked! After all, he *is* only a kid, he's—"

"And stop calling him a kid!" Melanie yelled, beside herself by now. "The kid, the kid, the kid! It's one of those slimy, Catch-22 words which extort approval for the bloody child before the argument even starts! Why can't you at least use a neutral word, like the boy or the foundling or the bastard—or whatever the hell he is!"

She had gone too far, and she knew it. Remorse caught at her, checking, for a moment, the full flow of her anger. Hadn't she, right at the beginning, promised Derek her whole-hearted support in his brave new venture? Had she not resolved to back him up, to take his side, to be a true helpmeet, sharing the problems, the setbacks, the burdens, whatever they might turn out to be?

And now here she was, backing off at the first hurdle, failing him at the first real test.

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But *what* a test! It was the unfairness of it—that was what rankled. To expect that she, an ordinary housewife, who just happened to be married to a social worker, should be able to shoulder singlehanded, and at barely a day's notice, a ghastly and intractable problem which whole teams of experts had so far found to be utterly beyond them!

Because that was the truth of the matter. It was obvious. *Nobody* had been able to cope with Christopher; not the psychiatrists, not the child-care people, not any of those eight foster homes. And this was why, of course, Derek had been moved to make his highly unorthodox gesture. "*I'll* take him," he must have said when the committee discussing Christopher's case reached deadlock. "I'll take him home with me tonight—into my own family. My wife and I will give him what we all agree he needs—the security of a loving home." Or words to that effect. Grand words, anyway—heroic, laying himself on the line. And the committee, in duty bound to protest at the irregularity of such a proposal, would nevertheless have been secretly thankful at being thus let off the hook, and with due show of hesitancy would finally have acquiesced in the hare-brained proposal.

After all, if it failed he'd be the one to carry the can. And if it succeeded—why, what a break for everybody! The kid had been on the books for years—a chronic groan in everybody's in-tray. Good old Derek. Provided he made a success of it, that is.

Success. Melanie turned the word over in her mind. Success, presumably, meant turning Christopher into a pleasant, outgoing, well adjusted boy. And how did one set about it? Why, by showing him love, compassion, and tolerance, Derek had blandly assured her before rushing out of the house this morning, with a briefcase of important papers in his hand.

Love. Compassion. Tolerance. The whole bloody trio. And who was it, in practice, who was going to have to administer them? Not Derek himself, oh no. Safe out of the house from eight in the morning till eight or nine at night, he hardly ever saw Christopher, never mind trying to cope with him. *He* didn't have to snatch the scissors from the child's thin, swift fingers just before he sliced into the dining-room curtains; didn't have to clear up the mess when Christopher deftly upended the paraffin heater (fortunately, not alight) all over the bathroom floor, hadn't had to search out, endlessly, all those slivers of glass from the electric-light bulbs before Alison hurt herself on them.

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Even as the thought passed through her mind, another of the slivers glinted up at her, this time from among the sofa cushions.

"Look!" she screamed at Derek. "Just look! Someone could have sat on it! Or Alison might have—"

"But she didn't, did she? Look, darling, do pull yourself together and stop getting hysterical over nothing." The honeyed detachment of his tone would have been the last straw had she not heard the fear behind it, the desperate pleading. His back was toward her now. He leaned on the mantelpiece, face in hands, and his voice came to her muffled.

"I'm sorry, Melanie. It's been rough on you—don't think I don't know it. But *please*— Oh, Melanie, don't you see? I've taken this on and I've *got* to see it through. I've *got* to. I *can't* fail, Melanie, I just can't."

She heard the despair in his voice, and "Of course you won't fail," she assured him. And hoped that he didn't hear the despair in hers.

At first she'd thought that Christopher must be mentally defective, so pointless was the destructive behavior in which he engaged—gouging shallow trenches in the polished table with the point of a knitting-needle, lining up all Alison's plastic farm animals as if for some nice little game with her and then with a brass candlestick smashing them systematically one by one, with a speed and economy of effort that would have done credit to a factory assembly-line.

"Mentally defective?" Derek had scoffed at the idea. "Of course he isn't! He's quite bright, actually. They've done tests . . ."

"Oh, *tests!*" Melanie had mocked—but soon had to change her tune when she discovered for herself that indeed he was quite bright. In his quieter moods, he enjoyed doing crossword puzzles; and sometimes, just for fun, he would set himself quite awesome arithmetical tasks, filling whole sheets of paper with columns of figures to add or multiply or divide and coming up with the correct answer at quite phenomenal speed.

The first time he'd done this, Melanie, laboriously checking the result and finding it correct, had been fulsome in her praise.

"Christopher! That's marvelous!" she'd enthused. "I think you're the most wonderful—" But barely was she launched into her flattering speech when a wary, malevolent look came over the sallow little features. He twisted the paper from her hands and tore it across and across into tiny pieces, hurling them to the floor and then stamp-

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ing on them, over and over again, as if they were tiny living creatures he wanted to be certain he'd killed.

Derek, hearing about the incident later that evening, had looked worried at first. Then, his face clearing, he'd started talking about rejection syndromes and had urged Melanie, quite kindly, to try and avoid being patronizing. "Treat him as an equal," he'd admonished her, before disappearing into his study to get on with some important work. "Talk to him as you would to an adult."

Well, how *do* you talk to an adult who behaves like that? And who then, when you ask him gently what's bothering him, gives you a glance of total loathing and bolts upstairs to his room, his feet scuttering on the stairs like a startled rat and his door slamming so that the whole house shakes? They were familiar sounds now, this pattering of feet and slamming of a door, and, to Melanie, very dreadful. They meant, always, that Christopher was escaping from the scene of some crime—sometimes trivial, sometimes serious, but always terrifying until she had managed to discover what it was, and where.

It was useless trying to talk to Christopher about his misdemeanors—or, indeed, about anything—and at one point she'd found herself wondering if maybe he actually couldn't talk. But he could, perfectly well, when he chose, as she discovered on the afternoon when she tried (very gently and humanely, as Derek would have wished) to dissuade him from a second assault on the electric lights, to explain to him—rationally, nonjudgmentally, and all the rest—about the practical problems that were liable to arise from the smashing of lightbulbs: the expense of buying new ones, the danger from the splinters of glass—

Christopher seemed to be listening, taking it in. His eyes never left her face, and when she had quite finished—not before—he gave his considered reply:

"Bloody fucking lights!" he observed. "Who needs the bloody fucking lights?"

Alison was enchanted.

"Buddy fuckin' yights!" she chortled, gazing up at Christopher adoringly. "Buddy fuckin' yights! Buddy fuckin' yights!"

The phrase had really grabbed her and she went on repeating it, on and off, all the afternoon, until at last Melanie got fed up with it.

"Hush, Allie, that's—" She stopped herself in time before saying the forbidden word "naughty." "That's a *silly* thing to say, Allie. You mustn't keep saying those words."

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Unfortunately, Derek, arriving home at just this moment, had heard it all, and later he reproached Melanie for her prudish and repressive attitude.

"And especially since she learned the phrase from *Christopher*," he pointed out, pronouncing the name in a hushed, holy kind of way as if it came out of the Bible. "Think how rejected the poor kid's going to feel if we don't let our own child learn from him and imitate him! You know," he added with that exaggeratedly nonjudgmental look Melanie was learning to dread, "this could be the breakthrough we've been waiting for! It could be the start of a real relationship between him and Allie. He's never experienced a real relationship before, not with anyone, ever. It could be the making of him! Don't you see? The simple, uncritical love of a tiny child."

Over my dead body, was Melanie's immediate thought. But she held her tongue, hoping that, if not discussed, the idea might fizzle out.

But it didn't. The very next evening Derek brought it up again. He had evidently been mulling it over all day.

"About Allie and Christopher," he began, not quite looking at her. "You know what we were saying yesterday—well, all right, what *I* was saying—about cultivating a real, meaningful relationship between them? Well, I've been thinking, and it seems to me that the first thing is to let them play together sometimes. Play on their own, I mean—unsupervised. What do you think?" And when Melanie remained obstinately silent, he continued, a certain edge coming into his voice:

"Look, Melanie, I don't want to seem to criticize, I know you're doing your best, but I do think you're making a mistake the way you keep watching them all the time, whenever they're even in the same room. You never take your eyes off them. He must notice it, you know—he must feel it. It must seem to him that you don't trust him with her."

"Bloody right I don't. And I never will. If you'd seen the things he does with scissors—with hammers—with knitting-needles—"

"But not to *her*. He's never attacked *her*, now, has he? He's fond of her, it's obvious, and if we can only get that fondness to grow, to blossom, it could be the salvation of him. Don't you see, darling? But for this to happen, you have to *trust* him, stop being so wary, so suspicious—always expecting the worst. Like the way you invari-

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ably lock the nursery door at night after she's in bed. What do you think he feels about *that!*"

"What *he* feels? What *I'd* like to understand is what *you* feel, Derek, that you're willing to put your own daughter in such awful danger! Do you see yourself as Abraham or something, sacrificing your child's life to prove your faith in the Great God Freud?"

And so the battle raged, until both were exhausted and there were only a few more shots left on either side.

"There shouldn't *be* locked doors in a family home!" Derek pronounced virtuously. "It's a *home* we're supposed to be offering the poor kid, not a detention center!"

"And so what about your study door?" Melanie countered sharply. "I notice you keep *that* locked firmly enough! How about trusting him in there with all your papers, and the wine racks, and the beat-the-budget whisky?

"That's different! Those papers are *important!*" He stopped, quelled by his wife's icy glance.

"Well, okay, Melanie. You win. Fair's fair, and I do see your point. If I'm asking *you* to trust him, then it's only fair that *I* should trust him, too, right? So from now on I leave the study door unlocked and you leave the nursery unlocked. Okay?"

It wasn't okay. Never in a million years. Come what may, she would go on locking that door, clinging to the frail hope that she might, by various devious ploys, prevent Derek noticing that she was doing so.

Such hope was short-lived. Only two days later, on the Saturday, Derek found himself, for once, at home and at leisure in time to put Alison to bed himself—bathing her, telling her a story, making her Teddy bear dance a hornpipe on the coverlet, all the things he hadn't had time for for ages, and in which Alison, of course, delighted.

"More, Daddy, more!" she squealed. Then, racking her brain for further delaying tactics: "Daddy, you haven't said goodnight to Teddy! Daddy, you haven't hung up my d'essing gown!" and then, finally, when he had at last got himself outside the door, "Daddy! Daddy! You haven't yocked my door! Mummy always yocks my door!"

That did it. Within seconds of Derek's pounding down the stairs, the row was in full swing.

"You promised!"

"I did not! Over my dead body will she be left at the mercy of that vicious little—"

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"Don't you dare talk about Christopher like that! It's all your fault! You've hated the poor kid ever since he set foot in the house! If you'd ever shown one spark of kindness, one single glimmer of—"

And it was then, through the noise of both their raised voices, that Melanie heard it: the pitter-patter of swift, scurrying feet—the slam of an upstairs door. And it was now, too, that she realized, with a lurch of horror, that this time, of course, the nursery door wouldn't have been locked.

In a flash, she was across the room, at the foot of the stairs, but Derek's arm dragged her back.

"See what I mean? You won't leave them alone for so much as two seconds! They're only *playing*, for God's sake—running around on the landing! If you keep interfering all the time, how do you suppose they can ever form a real, meaningful—"

And it was then, both at the same time, that they smelt burning.

Derek was at the top of the stairs first, three steps ahead of her, and as he flung open the nursery door, Melanie, behind him, heard his gasp of horror, smelt, too, the first, ominous whiff of paraffin.

A second later, he was out again, with Alison, unhurt, in his arms, while behind him, inside the room, a carefully stacked pile of newspapers shot flames upward and outward all around the cot. Even as she watched, the cot-cover, liberally sprinkled with paraffin, became a sheet of flame. The roar of it was in her ears—she could hardly hear the thunder of Derek's steps on the stairs as he raced the child to safety, shouting to her to follow him.

But she didn't. She just stood there, numbed with—was it shock? Or was it something else?

Christopher! She was the one who knew where he was, had heard the terrible pattering footsteps, had recognized the door that slammed as the study door. He was still in there.

She had thought for a moment that he would have locked himself in; but no, it was all right, here was the key in the door, on the outside. Someone must rescue the little fiend, push open the door, shout a warning, drag the poisonous, rat-faced little monster into safety.

Quietly, unhurriedly—for the flames had not yet crossed the landing—she turned the key on the lock, listening to be sure that the latch had clicked home. Let the pattering little feet go pattering down into the Burning Fiery Furnace, let him this time slam the door of Hell behind him.

Safely and swiftly she must have slipped down the stairs, for here

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she was, unnoticed, in the noise and the confusion of the garden. Neighbors, passers-by, half the world seemed to be gathering, calling to one another, rushing around, trying to help—one of them was already hurrying Alison to the safety of a house two doors away.

And now the firemen. The clanging bells, the shouts—"Get back! Get back!" And water—water everywhere. In the midst of all this, Derek, white-faced, came darting from the house. A fireman shouted at him angrily. And now the firemen were swarming all over the house, outside and inside.

Inside. Where, before many minutes, they would find a small dead body behind a locked door: *a door with the key still in it, locked from the outside.*

It was some hours later before she learned that Christopher hadn't died from the fire at all (it never, in fact, spread to the study), nor even from the smoke. He had died from drinking a whole bottle of whisky at a sitting, on top of no one knew how many tastes of the various bottles that lay opened, higgledy-piggledy, all over the floor.

"Must've locked himsef in so's not to be interrupted in the middle of his binge," someone suggested; and this was the first inkling Melanie had that the key had not, after all, been found incriminatingly on the outside of the door where she had so unthinkingly left it.

In fact, it hadn't been found on the inside, either. No doubt the unfortunate boy had hidden it somewhere, so everyone surmised: it was bound to turn up sooner or later.

And turn up it did, very late that same evening. It turned up in Derek's jacket pocket, and it was Melanie who found it, deep down under his car-keys, handkerchiefs, and the rest. She held it for a minute in the palm of her hand, studying it, and at first not quite getting the message.

It came to her, though, quite quickly. She recalled Derek's white face as he raced out of the house that second time. She'd wondered, momentarily, what he'd been doing: now she knew.

He'd found that door locked, and instead of instantly unlocking it, horrified at what he'd found, he'd *left it as it was*—except for taking the precaution of removing the incriminating key.

He had done, in effect, exactly what she had done, knowing—as he must have—that she had done it, too.

And now *she* knew that *he* had done it.

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How could they live with this knowledge, for all the rest of their lives?

How could they face each other ever again?

Perhaps if neither of them ever spoke of it to the other? If neither of them, ever, by hint or look or gesture gave the smallest indication of the thing that they both knew?

Lives have been lived like this, surely? Many lives, perhaps? Who knows?

One thing at least she could do. She could get rid of this terrible key—a black, indestructible reminder of the thing that henceforth must be forgotten.

Her hands trembled as she picked it up. It felt cold as poison; and smooth, somehow, as if polished by the endless wiping off of blood. Leaning as far as she could out of the window, she flung it with all her force into the midnight garden, right to the very end, where the tangled, uncultivated bit would cover it over completely and no one would ever find it.

And in fact no one did, at least not for a good many years. It was during one summer holiday from school that Alison, now nearly eight, came across it deep in the tangle of undergrowth that she liked to pretend was a forest. Delighted by her find, she ran indoors with it, full of excitement, and announced that it was Bluebeard's key, she just knew it was!

The game caught on. The weather was beautiful that summer, and all through the long golden days she and her little friends played Bluebeard, rushing in and out of each other's houses, shutting each other in cupboards, and chopping off each other's heads with pretend scimitars.

The other mothers all seemed quite happy about the game—a quite normal, typical sort of pastime, they thought, for children of this age.

But Melanie hated it. She tried to deflect the children onto something else; but in vain. In the end, she actually confiscated the key; but at this Alison became quite frantic in her protests:

"*Mummy!* I *must* have the key! It's my Bluebeard key! It's the only key that will open the cupboard where there are all the severed heads!"

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

At the back of Hingston's mind was the recollection of a murder committed in Chicago by two men—Leopold and Loeb—who did it only to prove to themselves it could be done. And there had been other such cases . . .

A BUCKET OF ICE-COLD LIFE

by WILLIAM BANKIER

"I'm not afraid." Brian Hingston left his wife hanging back shyly in the hotel lobby and went to peer through an open doorway at the writers in conference. There must have been three hundred people in the main salon. A bespectacled woman was speaking from a lectern on the head table at the far end of the room. A banner identified the gathering: *The English Thriller Writers Association.* The speaker held up a mousetrap, said something, and everybody laughed.

This brief inspection would allow Hingston to believe he had been there. He returned to Janice, proud in this public place to be associated with her golden beauty. "It looks boring," he said. "They're sitting in rows like a bunch of fund-raisers."

"Another dream comes crashing down."

"Not really." He took her arm and guided her toward the cocktail lounge. "I've seen the way it is and that's useful to a writer. Let's have a drink."

At a table near the door, sipping gin, Janice said: "All the way in on the bus from Putney—it seems an anticlimax."

"Can there be that many thriller writers in England? Most of them must be dreamers like me. I don't feel so humble now about my two published stories."

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"*And* you teach school all day. I think your stories are a magnificent achievement."

Hingston exchanged a warm glance with his wife. How would he exist without her? "I'm not satisfied," he said. "I feel an urge to write something bigger—but I haven't got the time."

Their seven-year-old daughter was with Janice's mother in the house near Putney Bridge. They had come into London impulsively after Hingston saw an item on the Friday-evening news about the ETWA Conference in Piccadilly. Soon they would have to go and collect Felicity from the permissive care of Mrs. Lomax and head on home to Southfields.

It was ten minutes to three, time for last orders according to the drinking laws. Hingston signaled and managed another gin for Janice and a double whisky for himself. The drinks were on the table when a heavy-set man entered the lounge and snagged a waiter by the arm. "Bring me a scotch, please. A large one."

"Sorry, sir, the bell has rung. We're closed."

"Bloody hell, don't play that game with me."

Hingston studied the owl-face, the smooth grey hair covering most of the forehead, the pale eyes behind glasses with gold wire frames. "That's him," he whispered. "Marius Mott."

"Who?"

"He writes the Inspector Foden books. Dozens of them. They're on TV now. We saw one of the movies."

Janice's eyes widened. "Good Lord, Marius Mott!"

The waiter retreated to the bar, smugly immune to the crime novelist's coercion; he had the law on his side. Mott lingered near the lounge entrance, troubled partly by thirst, mostly by wounded pride. Hingston got to his feet, fresh glass in hand, and touched the older man's arm. "I've just ordered this, haven't touched it." He extended the glass. "Large whisky. You're welcome to it, Mr. Mott, sir."

Mott looked into the face of this overgrown youth who was offering him a drink. He saw broadly spaced, innocent eyes and a smile from a chewing-gum commercial. In those eyes, Mott saw admiration. He glanced at the woman cradling a handbag on her lap as if to drop it would be to kill it. She was excessively beautiful.

"Thank you, son." Mott accepted the drink and knocked it back in three swallows. "As the saying goes, I needed that."

"It's a famous feeling, Mr. Mott. In *Death Will Never Die*, Inspector Foden spends a long weekend with those total-abstinence people,

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and when he leaves he walks seven miles across country to the Fox and Grapes."

"Won't you join us?" Janice said to the writer whose smile had turned the owl-face to pussycat.

"Here's a better idea," Marius Mott said. "This oasis has run dry. Why don't you charming people let me repay your kindness? I've got a bottle in my room."

Janice sat in the armchair by the window. Mott apologized for the whisky he handed her, knowing she preferred gin. Hingston took his drink and sat on the end of the bed where the mattress was firm. Their host paced the few yards of floor, his quarterdeck on a calm sea. "To my good Samaritans."

They talked about the conference through the first drink. With the second, Hingston accepted Mott's invitation to say something about himself. He taught ten-year-olds at a school in Southfields. Yes, he liked it but he would rather be a writer. No, it was more than wishful thinking—he had been writing all his life and two of his stories had been published.

"Are they any good?"

"Not bad. But I aspire to something more important."

"They're terrific stories, Marius. I wish you could read them." Janice was doing well on the whisky.

Mott settled on the window ledge within arm's reach of her. He extended the square hand of a builder and applied one stroke to the golden hair. "Loyal wife, bless your heart. Lucky man, Hingston, with this to lean on day by day."

Hingston remembered reading somewhere that Mott lived alone. "I never forget how fortunate I am," he said.

The telephone rang. Mott answered and made faces while he pretended to be pleased. He said: "Sounds lovely but I'm afraid I can't. I have a young friend with me at the moment, together with his charming wife, and I am advising him about his career. No, I don't call it working, I call it a pleasure. Sorry, darling, dinner is out."

When the call was over, Hingston flashed his watch at Janice. "We'd better be off."

"Don't rush away. Make an honest man of me. I've used your presence as an excuse to avoid a stupefying evening."

"I wouldn't mind some advice from you on my career."

"Here it is," Mott said. "It's the same for every writer, Brian. Do it."

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"I have a job, remember. A family to support. Stories are one thing, I've managed to scratch out a couple that were successful, but the big one, the novel—"

"If it's there, you'll find the time."

Mott insisted on ringing room service. "You'll be doing me a favor, I hate to eat alone. And I can't show my face in the lobby—Lady Lucinda Crashing-Bore is sure to see me."

Janice telephoned her mother and arranged for Felicity to stay on for a few more hours. Joy in Putney was unconfined.

The food came, and while they ate Mott did most of the talking. He had emerged decades ago from an advertising agency and could tell stories of the days when he wrote what other people told him to write. "I could have gained more satisfaction," he said, "sitting in Trafalgar Square composing letters for tourists at fifty pence a page."

The Hingstons laughed and Mott opened up like a rose in sunlight. His homely face became beautiful and his narrative style more ornate than any passage in his tightly written books.

With the meal finished and a glass of brandy in his hand, Brian asked a question about the author's fictional hero, Inspector Foden. "He seems real. He's got all these negative characteristics but the villains are worse and Foden wins in the end."

Mott's gaze drifted to the window and out across the helter-skelter roofs of London. "Foden has real elements in him," he admitted. "I'm familiar with a man who— Never mind."

Mott turned on a lamp and they saw how dark it had become. "We'll have to go," Janice said.

"One for the road," their host insisted. "You can sober up on the bus." He was pouring drinks with flair now.

Hingston went on about his aspirations, enlarging upon what he had said earlier. Mott had heard the complaint a hundred times—the doctor, the lawyer, the taxi driver could write a book if he had the time. But young Hingston seemed different. A couple of his stories had been published. And there was a spark of determination in his eyes that Marius Mott remembered from a mirror he had looked into when he was a young man.

"I have a suggestion," Mott said when Hingston had finished. "You'll think it outrageous—it is. You'll think me mad—perhaps I am. But give it serious consideration because it could change your lives."

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"What's he going to say?" Janice took Brian's hand and grasped it hard. The roller coaster was about to start.

"We're listening," Brian said.

"In Cornwall, not far from the town of Penzance, I maintain a large house. It is very quiet, very private. Most of my work is done there. I'm a native, born in an even smaller place called Newlyn, just down the road. Anyway, for some time to come I am required to be in London. So, young Hingston, how would you like six months free and clear in a quiet house where there is nothing to do, believe me, but write your novel?"

The young couple were as stunned as if Mott had taken out a pistol and fired it into the ceiling. It was an incredible opportunity. But what about the teaching job?

If Hingston wanted to write a novel, he would have to concentrate on writing it.

But no teaching, no income.

Mott would deposit five thousand pounds in Hingston's account on Monday morning to cover half a year's income. Thanks were not required.

Brian turned to Janice. "We could have great times down there. I've seen Cornwall. Felicity would love it!"

"Hold on," Mott said. "You go alone or not at all. I am not providing a paid family vacation. Writing a book is hard work, my son. Lonely work."

The idea excited Hingston but it frightened him, too. "I'm not good at looking after myself," he began.

"A couple lives in. The Trethewys, James and Violet. They maintain the place, make meals, you'll have nothing to do but write."

Janice's eyes were swimming. She might weep or she might start singing. "Brian, I think it's fantastic. Don't worry about me and Felicity—we can move in with Mum. And we'll take the train down to see you weekends. Is that all right?"

"The occasional weekend is okay," Mott said.

"Then I see no problem." Hingston produced a self-deprecating laugh. "Except my lifetime bluff is about to be called."

Mrs. Lomax served tea. Hingston took his cup to the window and looked down over the Thames with the tide well in. A four-man scull swept past, bulky rowers bending to a powerful stroke. Janice was helping Felicity to jam and cream on her scone. "Cornish clotted cream," she said. "This is appropriate."

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When Brian maintained his silence, Mrs. Lomax intoned: "Be careful what you wish for—it may be granted to you. Or words to that effect."

"Sorry?" Janice said.

"I know what she means." Hingston turned to face his family. "All my adult life I've wanted this opportunity. Now it's been offered to me and I'm scared to death. Give me back my nice safe job in the classroom," he pleaded, "where only the kids can fail."

Mrs. Lomax said: "It's natural for you to be uneasy. But wait. You'll put down your creative roots in this house—you'll have no choice—and out of loneliness and anxiety will come good works."

Hingston traveled by train to Penzance and took a taxi to the house. It was a large cottage with extensions representing the prosperity of various owners since the building went up in the 1700s. There was open ground on all sides, some magnificent trees, and enough hedges to make him glad it wasn't his job to trim them. The distance from town seemed a reasonable walk in good weather.

An early surprise was the age of the people in residence. Hearing Mott speak of them—James and Violet Trethewy—Hingston had imagined a slow-moving couple, weathered, taciturn, borrowed for the occasion from a Victorian repertory company. But it wasn't like that.

Lugging his suitcase toward the porch as the taxi drove away, Hingston heard the thud of an electric bass guitar. When he climbed broad wooden steps and rang the doorbell, the guitar fell silent. The door was opened by a tall young man dressed in jeans and a T-shirt and wearing a ginger beard. He grinned and reached for the suitcase as if they had rehearsed this entrance several times. "Mr. Hingston, welcome. I'm Jim Trethewy."

"Hello, Jim. Call me Brian."

"Marius insists on first names, too." He carried the bag to the foot of a polished mahogany staircase. "Vi!" he called along a dark passage beside the stairs. "He's here!"

She couldn't have been far away. She approached, carrying a dishtowel and a copper pot, strands of short blonde hair clinging to her forehead. She was far too confident of her effect on men to worry about her appearance. She was leggy in her peasant skirt and she gave Hingston a handshake that was warm and strong.

"You're young," she said.

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Hingston laughed louder than he intended to. "Since I passed thirty, I thought I was getting old."

"When Marius said schoolteacher, I saw somebody like the bloke in the film on telly the other day. Who was he, James?"

"Michael Redgrave. Crocker-Harris in 'The Browning Version.' "

"The kids called him 'the Crock.' " She watched Hingston's eyes. "You don't look like any crock."

"My class calls me a lot worse, I can assure you," Hingston said.

Violet brought him a meal on a tray—roast lamb, buttered new potatoes, tender sprouts, and a bowl of bread pudding that proved to be rich with jam and rum-soaked raisins and thick Cornish cream. At the Trethewys' suggestion, he was taking his meal in the room where he would work; there was never any possibility that he would eat with them. She showed him the electric coffee-maker, the jar of kenya beans, the grinder, the little refrigerator stocked with milk and bottles of light ale.

Before she left him, she said: "We can show you the house later tonight or tomorrow. Or you can take your time and explore."

"Exploring might be more fun."

"You're like me." In the doorway, she gestured left and right. "Bathroom. Bedroom. Ta-ra, Brian!"

While he ate, Hingston looked about Mott's study. He was impressed. The walls, where they could be seen between massive shelves of books, were paneled in knotty pine. His tray rested on a Jacobean refectory table. He was seated on a short-legged armchair upholstered in olive velvet. A small rack on the floor near a television set held eight bottles of wine.

Centered under the window, a rolltop desk dominated the room. It was massive in size, Dickensian in character. The cover was up, revealing pigeonholes stuffed with bits of paper; rolled down, it could easily have concealed the body of a man. Hingston experienced a wave of intimidation. Here the great author sat while he wrote his numberless novels. At that desk, he opened letters containing information about royalties in five figures and film contracts offering much, much more.

Hingston summoned humor as an antidote to the poison of envy. Soon I will ascend the throne, he told himself. But first I intend to finish my pudding.

He was at the desk when Violet returned for the tray, in a leather armchair which was big enough, he thought, for himself and Marius

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Mott and the ghost of Robert Louis Stevenson. "Getting the feel of it first night?" she said as she arranged dishes on the tray. "That's the way to do it."

"Otherwise I'll get stage fright and never start."

"Can't see that happening to you."

Trethewy's voice bellowed cheerfully from the bottom of the stairs. "I'm off, Vi!"

She went to the doorway and put her head outside. "Try to play in tune!" she called.

Her husband laughed, after which the door slammed and his tread could be heard through the upstairs window as he crossed the gravel yard.

"He's off to the pub. His band plays there three nights a week." As Hingston held the door for her to carry her load through, she added: "Last I'll see of *him* tonight."

Hingston, as the sun went down, was overcome by homesickness. Felicity would have had her bath by now and would be pestering her mother for another half hour of television before bed. There was a telephone in the study. Hingston picked it up. The line was dead. His anxiety turned to panic. Then he saw a loose plug at the end of the cord. Of course, Marius Mott would not allow a telephone to interrupt him while he was working. Clever bastard. Machiavellian sonofabitch, moving Hingston out of his happy home, shifting him down here, satisfying some egotistical urge to shape the lives of other people.

He plugged in, lifted the receiver, heard a tone, and dialed the London area code and his home number. Mott hadn't offered the use of his telephone for long-distance calls, but neither had he mentioned the terrors of solitary confinement.

"Hi, it's me."

"What a nice surprise." Janice sensed something in her husband's voice. "Are you all right?"

"A bit of panic when I realized I couldn't talk to you."

"But you can. Here I am, it's all right. Listen to what Felicity did when Mum mislaid her glasses."

Ten minutes later, Hingston put down the phone. He was fine, he was an adult man in a civilized world. People fell out of airplanes, they drifted on rafts in high seas. *Then* they had cause to be frightened.

His eye fell on the rack of wine. What the hell, in for a penny, in

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for a pound. Marius Mott's brilliant idea was for Brian Hingston to make use of the resources of his Cornwall hideaway. A liter of red would help him sleep. The bottle he selected carried an imposing label. It was fitted, inevitably, with a cork.

"Violet?" Hingston's call from his open doorway was directed down the stairs. He was surprised when Mrs. Trethewy appeared in the entrance to a room three from his own. She was wearing knee-length pajamas of pale-blue nylon.

"Hello, there."

He displayed the bottle. "I'm not quite thirsty enough to break the neck off this thing."

She laughed and skipped down the stairs like a schoolgirl late for breakfast. Hingston went inside and stood by the window, looking at his reflection in the glass, wondering how he could be feeling so positive when an hour ago he was ready to quit.

He sensed her behind him.

She was leaning against the doorframe, wrist on hip. "Did somebody say corkscrew?" she drawled with suggestive emphasis on the final syllable.

She was more than ready to accept a glass when offered. Hingston wondered if this could be the routine when Mott was in residence and James the musicker was taking another chorus at the pub.

"Happy days," he said.

"Happy nights," she adjusted the priorities. "Will you be all right now?"

It was as if she sensed how he had been feeling earlier. He smiled. "I think I'm going to make it."

"I never thought you wouldn't."

She was from St. Ives over on the other side of the peninsula. Had a mother there and a young brother. Adoration poured out of her when she spoke of that fortunate boy. She described the Dame Barbara Hepworth Museum and the sculptures in the garden there. Hingston must try to take it in. The only other sight worth catching in St. Ives was a fleet of beached fishing boats when the tide was out. Hingston told her he had seen the painting.

"The nicest thing about St. Ives," he added laboriously, "now resides in Penzance."

She was geared to accept compliments. Had he made her the gift of an additional year of life, he could not have pleased her more. "Thank you, kind sir," she said, blinking at him as she drank some wine.

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Her problem, she told him as she prepared to leave with the used glasses and the empty bottles, was that she couldn't raise the window in her bedroom. Hingston came with her to see what he could do. It was a broad sash window and it took a bit of heaving, but he managed, holding it while Violet propped it with a stick.

"I knew you'd get it up," she said.

Hingston laughed with her, standing in the warm room which smelled of her perfume and was lit by a small lamp on the bedside table. The cover was drawn back from a clean sheet and the pillow was indented with the shape of her head. "You're a naughty girl," he said, tapping her nose with a fingertip.

She took hold of his hand and pressed her lips to the palm. She transferred that kiss to her cheek and Hingston was astonished by the fever-heat. He thought of many things to say, clever excuses to get him off the hook, to see him back safely to his own room, but in the end he said nothing. They embraced and he was a teenaged boy again, on the Common with the girl he had met at the carnival, before all the rules and responsibilities took over his life and obscured the tremendous simplicity of what it was all about.

There was little rain in August. The month of September began with a continuation of clear nights, misty mornings, sun burning through by ten o'clock, and after that each day hung suspended, windless, smelling of ripe apples and burning leaves. The farmers were laughing as they dragged in a bumper harvest. The tourist operators began referring to their beaches where bronzed men rode the surf as "Tremalibu."

Mrs. Trethewy left the newcomer alone to get on with his work. She did some cleaning, some shopping, and made two fine meals a day. Husband James went about the area performing odd jobs as a plumber and electrician. Hingston took a daily walk along the cliffs, but most of the time he hid in Marius Mott's study, searching for a particle of truth in the myth that he was born to be a writer.

His remorse on the morning after the escapade with Violet was extreme. The downer lasted for days. He fought it with the well worn argument that a writer must open himself up to new experiences. But his conscience wouldn't let him cop that faulty plea. What was wrong with the continuing experience of resisting temptation, of leading a moral life? If experience was all, why not the experience of rolling in dung? Of eating hot coals? Of falling from the cliff beyond the house onto sharp rocks fifty feet below?

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Hingston avoided Violet as much as possible, kept his head down over the typewriter, setting aside the completed pages, afraid to face the disappointment of reading what he had written. His wife and daughter would be down for their first visit in a week's time. Janice would help him. She would say the correct words to unlock his talent, to get him working successfully.

"Your housekeeper is a dream," Janice said, drinking tea on the front porch within sound and scent of the ocean. She winked at him. "Housekeeper is hardly the word. Thank goodness she has that hunky husband. And this house, it's out of a film! Felicity love, stay close to the porch. That is called a flint. Yes, you can keep it—go and find some more."

Hingston propped one foot on the porch railing. He was feeling proprietorial. Having his family on hand was the answer, all right. He was nothing without them and he had better not forget it.

"So far I've produced forty pages of rubbish," he said.

"Not to worry. You have all the time in the world. Once your roots are down, you'll begin to produce. Mum appears ten years younger having Felicity to look after. I've been for a job interview—I could start next week. Don't look sad, I'll still have weekends to come and see you."

Touring the house, Janice could hardly find words to express her admiration. And when Violet Trethewy served the Hingston family a four-course dinner set up specially in the ornate dining room, Janice whispered when she was gone: "Whatever your anxieties, Brian, this is the experience of a lifetime."

Monday morning, alone again after he put his wife and daughter on the London train, Hingston buckled down to work. In the afternoon, he found the message in the desk. Unable to concentrate, he had begun taking pieces of paper from the pigeonholes, knowing Mott would notice the disturbance but no longer caring what Mott might think. He found tax notices, telephone receipts, the boring administrative records of somebody else's life.

Then he came across a typewritten sheet held with several others in a heavy metal clip. He read its message:

"The time will come when I will kill him. Don't ask me when. Notice how much better I type when I am drunk. The first step is allowing him to enter my house and stay. Once he is here, we must permit him to establish his confidence—and lower his guard. Then,

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probably at night because night is the best time for these things, I will do the job. After that, we will be happy."

Hingston's hands trembled as he replaced the bundle of papers. It was ridiculous to assume that the message referred to himself. What earthly reason would Mott have to lure him down here and then to kill him? At the back of Hingston's mind was the recollection of a murder committed in Chicago by two men—Leopold and Loeb—who did it only to prove to themselves it could be done. And there had been other such cases.

But not Marius Mott. The author was not insane. He was nothing but an imaginative, egocentric man who drank too much and who . . .

Hingston got back to work, writing and rewriting the same paragraph until five o'clock. Then he told Violet he would be eating out and left the house. He was disturbed by the note and by days of lonely effort without gratification. The road to Penzance wound through a wooded area, emerging at times within sight of the sea. Walking flat out, he covered the distance in half an hour.

Seeking a public house, he toured the center of town. It was built on a hill steep enough that one side of the main street was eight feet higher than the other. The top level was reached, when you crossed the road, by flights of narrow steps set ten yards apart in a stone parapet. There was an iron railing on top to keep the citizens of Penzance from falling into the traffic.

Hingston inspected and rejected various pubs. The Turk's Head was tiny and inhabited by ancient mariners. The Admiral Benbow was designed and operated by Swiss hoteliers. The Crown was loud with the tootle of electronic games. Finally, at the end of the street overlooking the harbor with St. Michael's Mount across the water glowing in a rosy sunset, he saw a colorful sign: *The Captain Flint.*

Hingston knew this was his pub as soon as he opened the door. There was a main room with two small rooms opening off. The bar was a small horseshoe. Some seats were black leather, some were oak. A lot of people were drinking, but there was no uproar, and no fried-food smell. He went to the bar and ordered his pint. As he paid, a voice close by said: "They won't feed you here like I do at home."

Violet Trethewy rode a high bar stool like a throne, her gin the orb, her cigarette the scepter. Hingston edged closer. "I ate fish and chips on the way. Cheers." The beer tasted fine. "Nice to have a night off, eh? Nice for everybody."

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"You look good in here," Violet said, her eyes giving him a going over. "I'm tired of seeing you camped over that typewriter."

They finished their drinks, Hingston ordered refills, and they moved to a corner table near a raised area supporting a drum kit and a couple of music stands. "Where is your good lady tonight?" Violet asked.

"In London."

"I know that. But where is she? Don't mind me, when I've had a few drinks I become mischievous."

At eight o'clock, James Trethewy showed up in the company of a rotund, bald-headed man and a sinewy youth with shoulder-length hair and professorial glasses. James acknowledged his wife's presence with a grin, then amplified it when he saw her companion.

The quality of the music impressed Hingston. He was expecting the usual pub-band sound, brassy clichés loud enough to support the babble of the so-called jazz buffs. Trethewy's group was different. The bald man sat behind the drums, took up his brushes, and began to fan the cymbals in a shimmering pattern as pleasing as the flicker of dragonfly wings in a garden. James plugged in his bass guitar, tuned it subtly, then superimposed a procession of resonant notes that caught Hingston in the pit of the stomach.

By this time, the tall lad had unpacked and assembled his tenor saxophone. He moved front and center, clamped the mouthpiece between his jaws as though the horn fed him instead of the other way around, and began to play. Each sustained note was preceded by a faint whisper of breath. Conversation ceased as the melody filled the room and flowed through the open doorway to enhance the warm Cornish night. Hingston remembered hearing an LP recording by the Duke Ellington Orchestra. This tune was on it, sung by somebody named Al Hibbler. It was called "Do Nothing Till You Hear from Me."

By ten o'clock the place was packed and Hingston was as drunk as he had been in years. The reference earlier to a fish-and-chip dinner had been a lie. All this good beer was having a free run at his stomach lining and his bloodstream. Communication with Violet in the roaring atmosphere required the close proximity of heads. More than once she kissed his cheek as she spoke to him, causing him to feel suicidally sure of himself. Once he stayed close when she turned and brushed his lips over hers. It was the right thing to do, the only thing, he could tell from the fire in her eyes.

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James Trethewy struggled through the crowd on his way to play the final set. "Enjoying my wife, then, are you?"

"What?" The noise was almost impenetrable.

"I said I hope you're getting good service out of my wife!"

Trethewy's bellow silenced those nearby. They watched as Hingston got to his feet. He heard the challenge in the musician's voice and his blood was pounding. "I find your wife six times more pleasant than you."

"That's what bothers me."

"Then you've got a problem."

"I see it as your problem," Trethewy said. Everybody was listening now.

The bartender called: "Calm and easy, gentlemen."

"We can go outside and settle it now if you want to," Hingston said, making a move toward the door.

Violet was satisfied with the scene as enacted so far. She knew the proper ending. "James," she snapped, "stop being silly and go back on the stand." She dragged on Hingston's arm. "And you, sit down and drink your beer."

The pub closed and there was a joyful milling about as most of the crowd streamed away on foot to be safely inside homes and restaurants before the drunks could get their cars on the road. James seemed to be heading off somewhere with his saxophone player. A couple of mature ladies in backless high-heeled sandals were going with them. This made Hingston feel better as he began to squire Violet home along the country road.

"Looks like a nice arrangement between you and your husband."

"Will you shut up about him?" She punched his arm.

Hingston was high. He began loping through the night under the trees, back and forth across the deserted road, shoulders bent, wrists scraping the ground. His reward was the helpless laughter of Violet Trethewy.

The doorbell rang in the distance. Hingston opened his eyes in darkness. The bell rang again. Violet sat up in bed and snapped on the light. The bell rang a third time. "I'll get it." She was up swiftly, covering her nakedness with a robe.

"Is it James?" Hingston's watch told him the time was half past two.

"James has his key."

"Marius Mott?"

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"Don't be a twit." She hurried out of the room. He heard her tread on the stairs, the unlatching of the door, then her startled comment: "Oh, it's you!" A deep voice rumbled. "Oh, God," she responded. More rumbling. "I'll get him. Go in and sit down."

Hingston was out of bed, weaving, still drunk, when she came back. "It's the police. They found James, dead. Murdered."

"What?"

"He wants to talk to you." She was whispering. She touched a finger to her lips, went away on tiptoe, and returned from his room with his robe and slippers. "They mustn't know you were here with me."

Downstairs in the sitting room, ready to wake up and accept all this as an alcoholic nightmare, Hingston confronted Inspector Pennington. The policeman was of the Trethewys' generation, not the grey veteran suggested by his rank. He was rawboned, square-faced, his suit crisply pressed, his hair oiled in the vain pompadour of a 1950s rock star.

"Sorry to disturb you . . . Mr. Hingston?"

"It's all right. James is *dead?*"

"Yes." Pennington waited. "We were wondering what you could tell us about it."

Hingston saw a uniformed officer filling the doorway. "Nothing. I've only just heard about it."

"The owner of the pub told us about your argument."

"A few angry words."

"That's how fights begin. What was it about?"

Hingston knew that Pennington knew, word for word, what the argument had been about. "I was drinking with Violet. He seemed to be jealous."

"They say you and Violet were behaving—"

"This questioning is not going to work. I walked home with Violet from the pub. We ate something and—" He almost said they went to bed. "Next thing I knew, you're telling me what happened."

"James was driving home in his car. Either somebody was with him or he stopped for somebody he knew. Whoever it was struck him on the back of the head. We found a rock with blood on it."

In the corner of the room, Violet moaned. Hingston had forgotten she was there. "Isn't that enough?" he said.

Pennington went to the young widow and stood over her, although he still addressed Hingston. "I could take you in. But you're a friend of Marius Mott, so I won't arrest you. Don't leave town, I may want

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to talk to you again." He put his hand on Violet's shoulder and she looked up at him. "Are you going to be all right?"

Hingston slept until almost noon. He hurried downstairs to find a suitcase placed by the front door. Violet appeared, wearing more clothes than he thought she owned. In hat and gloves, she looked like a doll dressed by a child.

"What's up?"

"I'm going home."

He could see the pain in her eyes. "Home?"

"St. Ives. My mother's place. There's going to be a funeral."

"Of course. I'm sorry." Now he was embarrassed to say what he had to say. "I can't find my wallet."

"I haven't robbed you, Brian."

"Come on. Was it in your room this morning?"

A taxi rolled in and sounded its horn. "I didn't see it. Feel free to search." She opened the door and he stood there watching her as she went to the taxi, loaded her suitcase, got in, and rode away. There was no wave, no smile.

Hingston closed the door and stood with his back against it, listening to the empty house.

The lost wallet was a writer's godsend—something to do all afternoon instead of writing. It wasn't in his or Violet's room, not in the kitchen or the front hall, not on the front or back porch, not on the ground surrounding the house. He considered going completely mad, finding a ladder, scaling it to search the roof and eaves.

By four o'clock, having put some food into a stomach that was barely back in business, he was at the great desk, tinkering with a page of yesterday's work. It was difficult for him to believe he had written these lines—they had nothing to do with anything.

Inspector Pennington showed up alone at five. He rang the bell, Hingston went downstairs and let him in, and they sat in the front room. Hingston welcomed the company even of the man who could put him in jail.

"One of the lads came across this." Pennington handed over Hingston's wallet.

"Where did you find it?"

"On the ground near where James's car was parked."

"I know what must have happened."

"I was hoping you would."

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Hingston remembered his lollygagging on the way home with Violet. He had been playing the ape, his shoulders down. The wallet must have slipped from his breast pocket. He told this to Pennington.

The policeman thought about it. "The hell of it is, I believe you," he said. "And that's a shame. I have the murder here of a man I liked. A local man. You're a stranger, staying in his house. Spending a lot of time with his wife. You argued with him publicly. Now your wallet is found at the scene of the crime." Pennington sighed. "I should caution you and arrest you and hold you for trial."

Hingston held his breath.

"But I feel it in my bones that you didn't have a thing to do with Jimmy's murder."

"Thank you for that, Inspector."

"Will you be going back to London?"

"Not for a while. I'm working here. Marius Mott has loaned me the house to try and help me."

"Just as well." Pennington stood up. "Stay around for a few weeks so your going won't look suspicious. Then disappear. You don't belong here."

"I can't say I feel at home."

"And stay out of Penzance. James Trethewy was well liked. If you show yourself there might be trouble."

Hingston did as he was told. The house was lonely, but at least it was safe, unless a vigilante party of Trethewy's friends came out from town some night with torches and a rope. No such dramatic event took place. Hingston made simple meals and slowly insinuated himself into his work. He didn't even telephone Janice about the murder. She would only worry and want him home. Hearing he wasn't free to leave, his wife would catch the first train and that would never do.

Why?

Because he was waiting for Violet Trethewy to come back from St. Ives.

Day followed day and she did not return. A period of mourning, he told himself, was to be expected. Three days after the funeral, the telephone rang. It was Violet. "Any calls for me?"

"None for anybody."

"I wasn't really expecting to hear."

"Are you coming back?"

"Soon."

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The call set Hingston wondering. He couldn't have said what aroused his suspicion but there was something in Violet's tone of voice that made him think of plans in progress. As he tried to fall asleep that night, his subconscious produced an explanation of events that took him by surprise. He studied the theory and found it plausible.

James Trethewy had been killed by Marius Mott. Mott was in love with Violet. Why not? If she was readily available to the schoolteacher from London, why would she resist the millionaire author who was also her employer? By killing James, Mott released Violet for marriage to himself.

In the light of this theory, the motive for Mott's curious offer of occupation to Hingston shone forth with brilliant clarity. Hingston was the patsy—he became the wife's lover, prime suspect in the murder of her husband.

Pennington's refusal to consider Hingston guilty was an unforeseen factor in Mott's planning of the crime.

The note found in the desk could be further evidence. "The time will come when I will kill him," it had begun. This was Mott communicating with Violet, letting her know what he intended to do. As for the wallet, Violet—Mott's accomplice—had taken it with her when she left the house on her way to St. Ives and had managed to drop it near the scene of the crime.

As he fell asleep, Hingston resolved to pass this material on to Pennington in the morning. The policeman might hestitate to accuse such a wealthy and influential man of murder, but there was something solidly stubborn about Pennington—he struck Hingston as a man who, once he got an idea in his mind, would see it through to the end.

Hingston was awakened by a sound in the house. His bedroom door was open. Pale light shone through from the hall. He was certain he had turned out all the lights before going to bed.

Violet! She had come home and was moving about, unpacking her bag, undressing, slipping into the skimpy nylon pajamas. Hingston flung his feet to the floor, crossed the room, and emerged onto the landing. Yes, her door was open, she was back! He moved along the corridor to a spot outside her door. Then he said her name: "Violet?"

The light went out. The corridor was now in total darkness since Hingston had not switched on his lamp when he got out of bed. He stood rooted to the floor. Heavy footsteps approached, kicking some

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piece of furniture aside. There was a pause, then hinges creaked as the door was drawn further open. In a frozen moment, he smelled whisky and felt the proximity of fear as naked as his own.

A rugged body rushed against him, knocking him aside, causing him to fall to his hands and knees, groping on the carpet. He heard footsteps descending the stairs at a run. The front door opened but did not close. He was alone in the house again.

Or was he? How clever of some maniac to fling the door open, then creep silently to one side and await the approach of the frightened resident coming to close the door. Hingston got up and used the bannister as a guide to lead him to the study. He turned on a light and plugged in the telephone. Emergency numbers were listed on a card beside the phone. He dialed the police.

"Get me Inspector Pennington, it's an emergency. I know it's late, but you'd better find him. Tell him Brian Hingston called about James Trethewy's murder."

Pennington sat with Hingston at a scrubbed table in the kitchen. They drank coffee as they talked. The Londoner outlined his theory. Marius Mott had killed Trethewy so he could marry Violet, with whom he had been having an affair. "She slept with me on my first night here," he said. "She must have been just as easy with Mott."

Pennington raised sleepy eyes from his coffee and looked deep inside the man across the table. "She only does it for her friends," he said quietly, "and she hasn't an enemy in the world."

Hingston laughed, then stopped when he realized he was laughing alone. "Violet rang me this evening," he went on, "to ask if she'd received any phone calls. There weren't any. She must have been talking to Mott in London and they got their communications mixed up. He came down here to be with her, let himself in with his key, was in her room waiting for her when I woke up and heard him. Not wanting to be seen, he came charging out and knocked me down."

"I believe the last bit," Pennington said. "Mott was in the house tonight." He stared through the kitchen window. "He's probably wandering around out there right now."

"Have a heart," Hingston said.

"He has nothing against you," the policeman said. "Nobody has anything against you. You're the innocent party."

"You're a strange man, Pennington. I can never tell when you're joking."

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"That's what they said about me in school." He pushed his cup aside and got up to leave. "I can never tell either."

Pennington seemed in a hurry to get away but before he left, Hingston found the typewritten note clipped together with a stack of Mott's personal papers and showed it to the policeman, who read it with interest. " 'The first step is allowing him to enter my house and stay,' " he quoted. "Sounds as if he means you. Maybe you *are* in danger, after all."

Hingston didn't go back to bed. He showered and shaved. He scrambled three eggs, made toast, poured a huge glass of orange juice, and emptied his coffee cup three times. By five o'clock in the morning he was installed in front of the typewriter, as fresh and alert as high noon.

The words flowed. Now he was cooking, at last he was in gear. Page after page left the machine to join the growing stack of typescript. All he needed was a bucketful of ice-cold life in the face to get him going. The machine thundered on . . .

Violet was in the room, shouting at him. "Brian, for God's sake, Brian. . . !"

He climbed up out of himself and turned to face her. She had one foot outside the door. "He's at the bottom of the cliff! Come on! I saw him from the road as we drove up!"

"Who?" He followed her from the room.

"Marius. He looks as if he's dead."

The taxi was leaving the yard as they hurried outside. Her suitcase stood on the porch. Violet led the way across the yard, over the lawn, into deep grass, and up a slope to the lip of the overhang. The sea was brilliant, white gulls wheeling. They had to kneel and peer over the rim of the precipice. There was no mistaking the crumpled figure on the rocks below—it was the body of Marius Mott.

Violet began to cry. Hingston thought he ought to put an arm around her but he couldn't do it. He saw her as a spider at the center of a web cluttered with the bodies of her victims. He stood up and backed off. "We'd better tell the police," he said, "before the tide comes in."

Pennington arrived alone. Violet let him in. Hingston, pretending to work, waited upstairs to be called. After ten minutes, he left the study and went down to the sitting room, drawn by the murmur of their conversation. When he entered the room, he sensed he was

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intruding. These were two friends recalling the good old days. Now that he was here, they would have to get down to the business of discussing another murder.

Pennington explained the situation. It was Mott, all right, and he was dead. It was hard to tell whether the fall killed him or whether he had been rendered unconscious and flung over the edge. "No signs of a struggle at the top," he said. "If he was hit, it must have been somebody he knew." The policeman looked first at Violet, then at Hingston. They looked at each other.

Hingston said: "May I have a word with you, Inspector?"

Violet carried her suitcase upstairs while the men walked out onto the gravel drive, where Hingston outlined his new theory. Maybe Mott did kill James Trethewy as previously suspected. But now, Violet had certainly killed Mott.

"For what reason?"

"Money. She's probably managed to get herself cut in for a good slice of his estate. He has no family. She'll be rich. Maybe she killed her husband, too. She could have sneaked out of here and met his car on the road. He would have stopped for her."

"Why did she kill her husband?"

"Freedom. Look at her situation today compared to what it was. She was married to a musician who left her alone, and she had for a lover an overage writer with an alcohol problem. Today she is a widow with a fortune coming her way. She's free to choose a younger man and live high."

Pennington looked down the road and watched the police ambulance pulling away. He walked to where his car was parked and got in. "You think Violet is capable of behaving like that?"

"It's possible."

"I think *you'd* better get back to London," Pennington said. He switched on and drove away.

It was good advice and Hingston decided to follow it. He telephoned Mrs. Lomax in Putney and asked to speak to Janice. "I'm coming home," he told his wife. "Terrible things are happening here."

"What?"

"Mott is dead. He fell over the cliff but they think he was pushed. And James Trethewy was murdered a few days ago."

"Days ago? Why didn't you tell me?"

"I'm telling you now. I'm too late for today's train but I'll be on the one tomorrow."

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Hingston finished his call and wondered what to do next. He went to the desk and began putting together his work in progress, storing the pages in a folder. He decided to take a souvenir. The typewritten page with Mott's sinister monologue on it would do nicely. He found it and extracted it from the metal clip. He was about to place it in the folder when he noticed a notation in pencil on the back of the sheet. It read: "Insert, page 83, before Foden entry." So the threatening message was nothing but a bit of menace from one of Mott's novels. Never mind—it would never come to court.

"Need any help with packing?" Violet stood in the doorway, holding a drink.

"I suppose you heard my telephone conversation."

"Poor thing, you sounded desperate. What's wrong?"

"This house. You."

"Me?" She came to him, lifted her arms to embrace him. "I thought you and I were very good."

He pushed her aside. "You must be sick. Your husband just died."

"I know that. You cold bastard."

"I'll *bet* you know it. I was ready to blame Mott, but not any more." He left the room at full stride, went into his bedroom, dragged out his suitcase, and flung it open. He heard her breathing as she entered the room behind him.

"Who do you blame now? I can't wait to hear you say it."

"Who is now free to sleep with any stranger who comes through town?"

"You don't know anything about me," she said. She was crying. "Jimmy and I loved each other. Not the way you pretend to love. He knew I had other men but it didn't matter. If he cared about things like that, I'd never have *looked* at you."

"I believe you." Hingston let the sarcasm ring. "What about Mott?"

"Yes, Marius loved me. That was how Jimmy and I came to look after this place. And it was fine until you came along."

"Don't blame me for your problems."

She was staring at him now, her eyes widening. "You! Of course. You're blaming me and I never put it together."

"Get out of here, I have to pack."

"I'm going. Down the road to see Paul Pennington. *You* killed James. You wanted him dead so you could have me."

"You're hysterical. Finish your drink and go to bed."

"Your wallet was found at the scene. You made a big thing of accusing me of taking it."

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"Accusing you? I asked if you'd seen it." Hingston began to feel a touch of anxiety. She was brimming over, she could make trouble for him with this story. "Will you calm down, Violet? I was in bed with you that night, remember?"

He reached for her and she knocked his hands away. "I was asleep for hours. I sleep soundly. You could have gotten up and gone out to meet James coming home. He knew you, you waved, and he stopped the car."

"No, nothing like that."

"Murdering bastard!" She went to the door, and when she turned the tears had stopped flowing and her face was white and hard. "Then you killed Marius so you could stay here. You thought you'd have me and the house all to yourself."

"That doesn't make sense."

"We'll see." She was gone, calling back to him: "We'll see what Paul Pennington has to say!"

He ran after her and caught her at the top of the stairs. She tore at his face with both hands, scratching him. "Stop it!" she screamed. "Let me go! You won't kill me!"

"I only want to talk to you!" He lost his balance and saved himself from falling down the stairs only with a desperate lunge at the bannister. His ankle turned and he felt pain. She was away, down to the main hall and out the front door, leaving it open behind her. He limped after her, calling her name.

Outside, he saw her disappearing into the woods. She was on her way to town, taking the shortcut. The worst thing he could do would be to sit tight, giving her time to tell Pennington her story. Paul, she kept calling the police inspector. They were friends. Everybody in this town had gone to school together. Hingston was the outsider.

He made his way into the woods, moving slowly on the twisted ankle. The ground sloped upward to a steep summit with the town a mile away on the other side. Once over the crest, it would be downhill from there. He reached the summit and looked across a panorama of open land broken by copses of birch and pine. The road to town curved away to the right. He saw a car pulled up on the road. A man was walking toward the trees—Pennington. Violet was halfway down the hill, waving her arms, calling to him. Hingston quickened his pace.

Entering a wooded area, he had to pick his way through deep undergrowth and between fallen trees. He wasn't sure of his directions but was reassured when he heard voices ahead. He could see

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the color of Violet's dress in a clearing. He couldn't see Pennington but he could hear his voice. As the words came through to him, Hingston slowed down, then stopped and concentrated on listening.

"We can do it, Violet. There's nothing to keep you here."

"Paul, shut up."

"I've got money put away. Come with me now. We'll get on a boat . . ."

"Don't put your hands on me, please."

"Is it the one from London?" Pennington's voice sharpened. "Is he the reason you want to stay?"

"No, I told you, he's crazy. He thinks I killed James. And Marius."

"He thinks that? God, it's such a crazy thing." Now the policeman began to laugh and Hingston, listening among the silent trees, thought it a melancholy sound. "If you won't come with me, what's it all been for?"

"What are you saying?"

"All through school, I loved you. We hardly had anything to do with each other, but I knew one day I'd have you. That's all I've been working for."

"Paul, don't . . ."

"I stopped James as he was coming home that night. It was quick. No pain. His back was turned, he never knew what hit him."

"You . . . ?"

"I thought one death would be enough. But Mott came back from London. My old friend, Marius."

"He was never your friend."

"We had many a drink together. He'd get me to tell him stories. He was using me, using my experiences in his books. I didn't mind."

"Are you drunk now?"

"I was watching the house that night and I saw him come running outside. He'd been seen getting off the train that afternoon. I knew something was up. He tried to laugh it off, said he'd gone in to play a trick on Hingston, make him think the place was haunted. I didn't buy that. I knew he was after you."

"You killed Marius, too."

"What chance would I have if you went on living in the same house with a rich man?"

"Let me go, Paul. I want to go now."

"But it's all over, love. No need for anybody else to die. Not even Hingston. I put the fear into him—he's clearing out back to London. If we move away, it'll all be forgotten."

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"Forgotten? My husband's murder? Who do you think I am? I'm going to see you in jail for the rest of your life! No, not jail, you madman—the insane asylum!" She started to run. Hingston heard the trampling. She was coming back on her tracks. He had only time to move behind a tree. Pennington was following her, a heavier tread. Hardly thinking, Hingston bent and picked up a length of fallen branch. It felt solid in his grasp.

Violet ran by, her face set, her dress torn. Next came Pennington. Hingston timed his swing. The wood struck him across the forehead and the policeman went down like a steer. She heard the noise behind her and turned back.

"Were you there . . . ?"

"I heard everything."

She put a hand on his shoulder. There was no flirtation in it, she was preventing herself falling to the ground. "Thank you, Brian."

"It was time you had some help."

Hingston had to remain in Penzance a few days longer for the hearing. He and Violet gave statements and were excused. Paul Pennington was not in the room. He was under treatment for a head injury. The medical officer's opinion was that he would be in one kind of hospital or another for the rest of his life.

Now, having confirmed with Janice that he was at last getting on a train and coming home, Hingston found a place in his suitcase for his file of typescript and snapped it shut. There was plenty of Marius Mott's generous grant unspent in the bank. He could give the book at least another six months before having to take up teaching again. He felt full of potential.

Violet's luggage was in the front hall downstairs. He set his beside it and found her in the kitchen. "I ordered a taxi for half an hour," she said. "Beer?" He found a glass and sat down facing her. She poured from a bottle of stout. "I hope you don't mind me coming up to London with you," she said.

Hingston minded all to hell. After the past weeks, he wanted to be done with complications. "You'll like it there," he said.

"I won't get in the way." She lifted that undefeated face to smile at him, flecks of foam on the curve of her upper lip. "Your wife won't even know I'm there."

"She'd better not," Hingston said, and they both began laughing helplessly.

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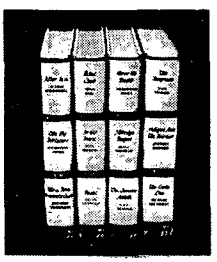

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DETECTIVERSE

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by DONALD AMMER

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I had to get into that house.
My wife said, "Now, honey, be careful,
And quiet and quick as a mouse."

I shushed her and then stuck my hand in,
And tugged at that doorknob all night—
Some Christmas Eve, building a dollhouse
And gluing the door closed up tight!

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"Q"

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by SUSAN F. WILLOTT

I'm sorry. I've just been murdered.
So I can't talk with you.
But leave your name and number,
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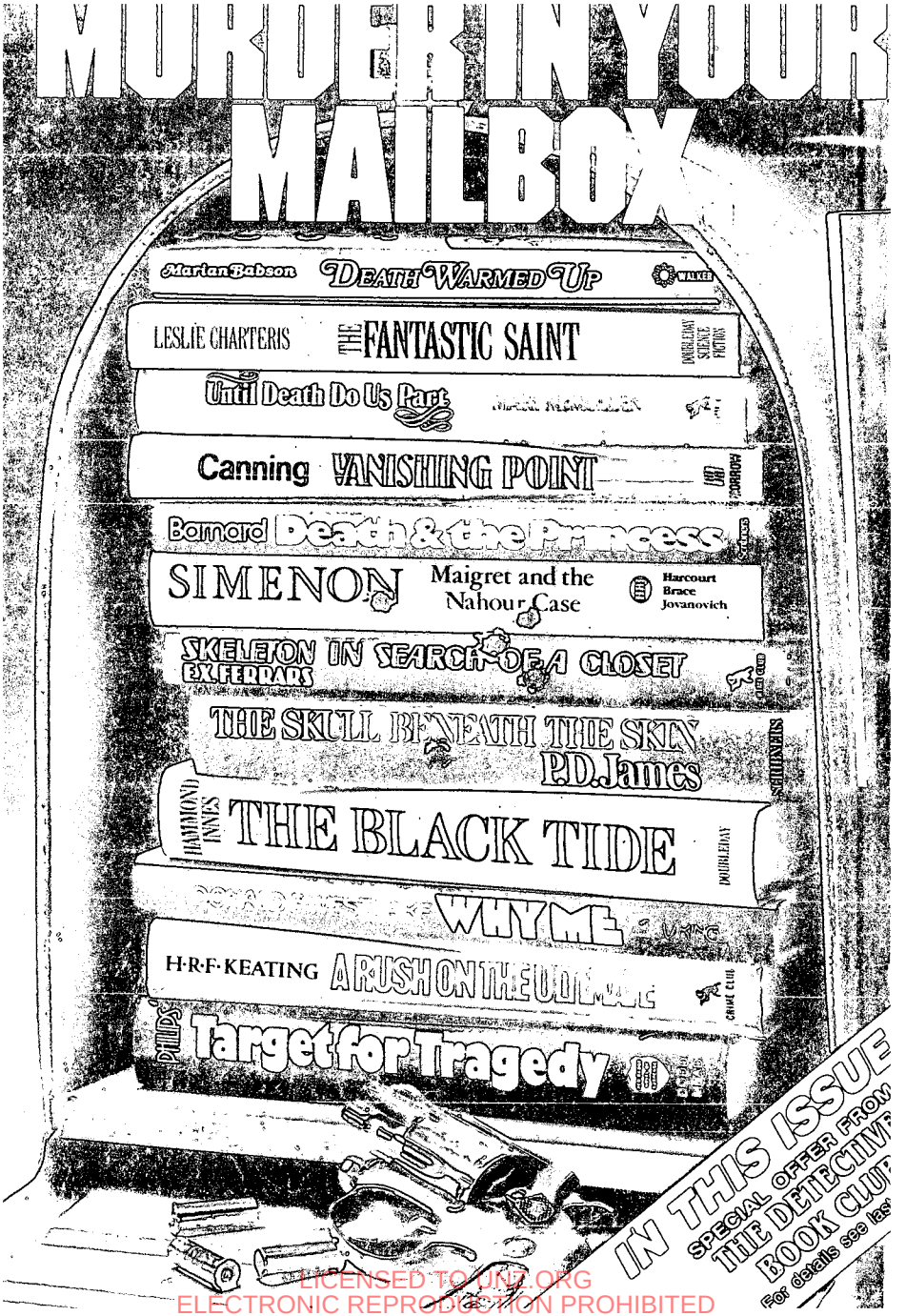

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